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Vietnam and the More Flags campaign, 1964--1965: The search for American allies in the Commonwealth

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VIETNAM AND THE MORE FLAGS CAMPAIGN, 1964-1965:
THE SEARCH FOR AMERICAN ALLIES
IN THE COMMONWEALTH

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Eastern New Mexico University
1999

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Masters of Arts Degree in History
Department of History
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Graduate College
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ABSTRACT

**Vietnam and the More Flags Campaign, 1964-1965:
The Search for American Allies
In the Commonwealth**

by

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In April 1964, the United States initiated the More Flags campaign in an attempt to establish a western coalition force and diplomatic support system for the South Vietnamese government and for American intervention against the North. Three of the most heavily courted nations were the Commonwealth members of Australia, Great Britain, and Canada. This first in-depth study of this diplomatic effort and the comparative response of these Commonwealth nations provides insight into the U.S. efforts at coalition building, the essentially unilateralist and nationalist nature of U.S. foreign policy, and the varying U.S. relationships with these three important members of the western diplomatic alliance at this stage of the Cold War. It exposed America's declining relationship with Britain and the shifting reliance of the middle powered Commonwealth members away from Britain toward the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

UNITED STATES SEARCH FOR MORE FLAGS

In an April 23, 1964, press conference, President Lyndon B. Johnson said that he hoped the United States would see more flags in Vietnam in a united effort to stop the spread of communism in Asia.¹ This simple statement was a public acknowledgement of a new State Department policy that became increasingly important as the United States intensified its involvement in the war. The policy known as the more flags campaign was launched by the State Department in April 1964 and continued through July 1965 when America officially committed combat troops for an offensive war in Vietnam in the hope of bolstering support for the Saigon Government and increasing allied aid for American action against the National Liberation Front and North Vietnam.

Among the most important flags being courted were the Commonwealth countries Britain, Australia and Canada. These traditional allies had mixed responses to the conflict. Australia was greatly concerned with communist aggression in Southeast Asia and quickly became a vocal advocate of US intervention. Britain was heavily committed in Malaysia and the Middle East and felt that Vietnam was of little economic and strategic significance. London was fearful that Western action in mainland Southeast Asia would spark Soviet or Chinese intervention, which could lead to a larger conflict.

¹ The Johnson Presidential Press Conferences, intro by Doris Kearns Goodwin (2 vols; New York: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, Inc., 1978), I, 102-105.

Canada was caught in the middle. As a member of the International Control Commission (ICC), established to oversee the implementation of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, Canada could not commit to any military action.

Set on the uncertain stage of the Cold War, the United States believed it could neither afford to lose the political support of its Commonwealth allies nor risk military credibility by losing Vietnam to the Communists. The Johnson Administration began the more flags policy to address this problem by acquiring increased support for American actions in Vietnam. Much emphasis was placed on alliance building based on the idea of mutual security needs and geopolitical stability. However, while advocating a multilateral, mutual defense strategy for Southeast Asia, Johnson was actually practicing a unilateral, interventionist policy that placed US nationalist interests above international considerations. The President had little regard for international organizations such as the UN, for international agreements, such as the Geneva Agreement of 1954, when they did not serve US purposes, or for international cooperation that infringed on US objectives.² This foreign policy approach reflected Washington's indifference to mutuality of interests and helped precipitate the shifting alliances within the Commonwealth.

The results of the more flags campaign reflected the impact that the Vietnam War had on America's relations with the Commonwealth members and on the Commonwealth relationship itself. Most of the historical literature on America's relationship with the Commonwealth members has been written from a bi-lateral perspective, focusing on Australian and Canadian reliance on either Britain or the United States and British

² Joseph A. Fry, *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789-1973* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 222-23, 294-97.

dependence on American backing, but rarely looking at the Commonwealth as a whole and the war's impact.

Historian Coral Bell contends that following World War II Australia found itself in a triangular relationship with Britain and the United States in which it was regarded as a minor power relying heavily on Britain and then America for security. Australia's traditional, automatic and unconditional mutual defense alliance with Britain was destroyed when World War II cast British reliability in a major war into question. Australian security reliance began to waver between America and the Britain in the two decades following the war until the economic struggles and communist threat of the 1960s pushed Australia toward Washington. The final shift in Australian security alliances came during the more flags campaign when American stopped viewing Australia as a minor power and began to consider it a middle power ally.³

Similarly, Gregory Pemberton asserts that after 1945, because of Britain's decline and the perceived Communist threat in Asia, successive Australian governments sought to align themselves with the United States in international policies. Washington was receptive because by the 1960s, the "need of the United States to conduct its policies within a multilateral framework was reciprocated by its allies need for security." Australia's involvement in Vietnam was the product of these mutual interests.⁴

Canada also experienced a shifting international position. John H. Thompson and Stephen J. Randal maintain that from the end of World War II through the 1950s, as Canada initiated an independent foreign policy from the Commonwealth, Washington

³ Coral Bell, Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1988), 1-6.

⁴ Gregory Pemberton, All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), xi-xiv.

and Ottawa established many “bilateral institutions and mechanisms” based on “economic interest and shared assumptions about the nature of the world and their responsibilities within it.” By the 1960s, however, different approaches to economic, cultural and defense policies began to fragment the relationship. Canada began to seek “a global ‘third option’ that could increase its independence of the United States.”⁵

While agreeing that Canada wanted to increase its independence from the United States in the 1960s, Greg Donaghy asserts that Ottawa sought only political and military and not economic independence. Canada actually developed a policy of “economic integration and political differentiation” toward Washington. The intent was to address its economic weaknesses by shifting from its traditional Commonwealth trading structure to a unilateral approach to the United States while still remaining politically independent of Washington by adopting “new military and diplomatic roles” that were “designed to reflect a unique perspective on international affairs.”⁶

Much has been written on Britain’s “special relationship” with the United States and London’s shifting reliance between America and Europe. Craig Wilson argues in his article “Rhetoric, Reality and Dissent: The Vietnam Policy of the British Labour Government, 1964-1970” that in refusing to commit troops to Vietnam while pursuing peace initiatives, the ultimate goal of Prime Minister Wilson was to preserve the special relationship. Ultimately, however, Wilson made no fundamental changes in the nature of

⁵ John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), 6-7.

⁶ Greg Donaghy, Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States 1963-1968 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 1-6.

the alliance and the British government became a “captive supporter” of US policy decisions.⁷

Chris Wrigley provides a directly contrary interpretation in his article “Now you see it, now you don’t: Harold Wilson and Labour’s foreign policy, 1964-1970.” Wrigley contends that Wilson’s decision to intervene in the peace process was solely an attempt to establish himself as a statesman. The Prime Minister’s actions were not a conscious assertion of independence from the “special relationship,” but rather the event proved to the Prime Minister and the British government that the United States had already begun to move away from the old alliance. It was not until after 1967 and the failure of Wilson’s mediation that the British Government recognized that it could not reestablish the long-standing US-British ties.⁸

Brian White adds to the historiographical complexity by arguing that the party’s Vietnam policy was not a break with the United States but was in fact an attempt to regain the relationship that had already been lost in 1959. In his article, “The decline of British influence on East-West Relations,” White maintains that the real turning point in the demise of the “special relationship” came in the 1959 Camp David summit between President Eisenhower and Premier Khrushchev which established a legitimate protocol for direct negotiations between the superpowers, thus removing the need for the third party intermediary Great Britain. The Vietnam War offered an opportunity for Great Britain to reestablish its special relationship by reinserting London into détente

⁷ Craig Wilson, “Rhetoric, Reality, and Dissent: The Vietnam Policy of the British Labour Government, 1964-1970,” The Social Science Journal Vol. 23, Num. 1, (1986), 17-31.

⁸ Chris Wrigley, “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: Harold Wilson and Labour’s Foreign Policy 1964-70”, in The Wilson Government 1964-1970. ed. R Loopey & S. Fielding. (London: Printer Publishers, 1993), 23-35.

diplomacy through mediating an end to the war. By accomplishing this, England hoped to regain its status as a Cold War arbitrator.⁹

All of these assessments are based in a bi-lateral approach to American relations with the United States and neglect the impact by and on the Commonwealth relationship. By using a multilateral approach to examine the American relations with the Commonwealth, the more flags campaign reveals a growing rift within the Commonwealth itself, and changing attitudes of each member toward its American ally. During the 1960s, there was a re-alignment among the Commonwealth members. As British disillusionment with the United States deepened, London moved its diplomatic position away from America toward the European community. Australia and Canada were ultimately forced to reassess the utility of the Commonwealth relationship and their economic and military reliance on the United Kingdom. Both began to see the United States as a far more reliable friend. At the same time, the United States faced a growing foreign policy crisis that forced Washington to shift its alliance structure to accommodate the changing international attitudes, especially those of Europe, toward America. Where traditionally the United States had relied on the United Kingdom as its main ally and had considered Australia and Canada only minor allies of the Commonwealth, during the Vietnam War the roles were reversed. Washington became frustrated with England's lack of commitment and learned to appreciate the role of the middle powered countries. Britain turned its focus toward the European community while Australia and Canada shifted their security reliance toward the United States. In the end, the more flags

⁹ Brian White, "The Decline of the British Influence on East-West Relations," in Britain, Détente and Changing East-West Relations (London: Routledge, 1992), 108-09.

campaign's lack of success exposed the growing rift in the American-Commonwealth alliance and provides useful insight into the process of alliance building.

United States Background to Involvement

To understand why the United States found itself needing to solicit allied help, it is important to understand the events leading up to April 1964. Following the end of World War II, the United States faced both the threat of communist aggression and the dilemma of how to interact with the post-colonial areas of Asia and Africa. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had often hinted that he supported complete independence for old colonial possessions, but by 1949 the Truman administration had to face the very real threat that international communists could take advantage of the vulnerable governments and economies of the newly independent nations. In response, the Truman administration chose to support French reoccupation of colonial territories in Southeast Asia. The decision was made out of a fear that weakening and alienating the European allies was far more detrimental to world security than upsetting third world areas that played a far less significant role in the world capitalist economy. While the decision upset the people of these less-developed countries, most notably the Vietnamese, Washington believed supporting French reoccupation was the best alternative at the time.

Once the Soviets had successfully detonated their first atomic bomb and Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists prevailed in the Chinese civil war in 1949, Washington turned to an almost zealous stance against communist expansion and began using its economic and military abilities to back virtually any non-communist area under threat.

By the early 1950s the United States became committed to stopping the communist insurgency in Indochina. While unwilling to commit military support to Southeast Asia, Washington diplomatically and financially invested in French Indochina with the intent of reinforcing the pro-western French presence on the mainland for as long as possible.

The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 again drew attention to East Asia and reinforced America's fear of the communist threat to the newly de-colonized areas of the world. The United States began to search for ways to strengthen the west's presence in these more vulnerable areas. It was decided that Japan was too great an asset to the western powers and too close to the communist threat to leave it in its vulnerable, post-war condition. Japan was a major Asian industrial power; was strategically vital to trade routes in the Pacific, especially the Asian market; and from its location, could be used to threaten either the United States or the Soviet Union. The Joint Chiefs of Staff envisioned a re-militarized Japan that could be used by the Western alliance against the Soviet and Chinese threat. The State Department, under Secretary Dean Acheson, believed that economic recovery coupled with a series of American military bases in Japan was the best solution. The United States decided that the only way to ensure a pro-western Japan would be to allow it to rebuild its economy and to militarily safeguard the island against the Soviet and Chinese threat.¹⁰

The greatest resistance to this objective, however, came from America's Commonwealth allies in the region. The memory of Japanese aggression in World War II was still fresh in the minds of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines. They disagreed with the leniency of Washington's proposed treaty and strongly supported a

¹⁰ Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 164-77.

firmer, more restraining settlement. All three were still greatly concerned with their own security in the region and wanted assurances in the form of treaty agreements with the United States guaranteeing American protection and assistance in their own strategic objectives. As a result, Washington agreed to the Australian, New Zealand and United States treaty (ANZUS) in 1951 which provided for consultation between the signatories in the event of a threat to any member and declared that the parties would “act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional process.”¹¹ While ANZUS had no provisions for military planning and remained only a civilian consultative body, the agreement laid the foundation for Australia’s heavy reliance on American military support in its future external policies. This reliance left Australia obligated to the United States when it intervened against the communists in Vietnam.¹²

The United States originally favored a single multi-national pact including Japan, the Philippines and possibly Indonesia along with Australia and New Zealand and excluding any military commitments on the Asian mainland. By offering security to all four, Washington would create an offshore, pro-western barrier defensible by air and sea power. Ultimately, the United States could not get all four to agree to enter into alliances with each other and instead chose to enter separate treaties with Japan and the Philippines.¹³

The United States did not want Britain involved in the Southeast Asian treaty system because of British commitments to the Asian mainland in Hong Kong and Malaysia.

¹¹ Howard Jones, The Course of American Diplomacy (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), 521; Department of State, “ANZUS Treaty,” American Foreign Policy 1950-1955, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), 878-880.

¹² Jones, Course of American Diplomacy, 521.

¹³ Ibid.; Pemberton, Australia’s Road to Vietnam, 25.

Washington feared that British commitment to the South Pacific region could lead America into an unwanted intervention on the Southeast Asian mainland.¹⁴ Britain opposed ANZUS because of its exclusion from the strategic decision making involving two of its commonwealth members. The British feared the treaty could lead to a possible military altercation that would force the United Kingdom participation through its commonwealth ties.

On September 1, 1951, the ANZUS treaty was signed. Australia saw the treaty as proof of its “special relationship” with America and began to shift its strategic alignment more heavily toward the United States. For Washington, the treaty had far less significance. The United States was more concerned with creating a global alliance of which ANZUS was only a small and somewhat insignificant part. To the United States, ANZUS was more a political gesture to ensure a lenient treaty for Japan, which was far more important to Washington’s global plan. In the end, the treaty proved more important to America than anticipated. As US involvement in Vietnam increased and international opposition heightened, one of the few sources of encouragement came from the ANZUS members.¹⁵

When, in early 1954, the French found themselves trapped at the battle of Dien Bien Phu and requested that Vietnamese peace negotiations become a priority at the upcoming Geneva convention, Washington scrambled to shore up allied support for future US action in the event that the French withdrew from Vietnam. President Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated discussions of a possible “united action” to save the French position. Many factors had to coincide before the United States could act. If France agreed to

¹⁴ Bell, *A Study in Australian Foreign Policy*, 48.

¹⁵ Pemberton, *Australia’s Road to Vietnam*, 27-30.

internationalize the conflict, the United States would commit to action when it had the full support of its allies. When approached about a united action, America's allies, especially Great Britain, refused to act before the Geneva talks had been exhausted. Based on the lack of enthusiastic support, Eisenhower tabled the idea of intervention until after the Geneva Conference and instead took the opportunity to strengthen the security treaty system with US Commonwealth allies in Southeast Asia.¹⁶

The Manila Conference of September 8, 1954, proved the opportunity Washington needed to gain a multilateral security treaty for Southeast Asia. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was created in Manila by the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the Philippines, Pakistan and India. The signatories agreed to a mutual defense of "the general area of Southeast Asia" in the event of "aggression by means of armed attack" or if the territorial sovereignty of any state within the Treaty Area was threatened "in any way other than armed attack." While the language was strong, the treaty did not provide for military commitment and only required each signatory to respond to aggression in "accordance with its constitutional process." The treaty was the culmination of America's desire to contain Chinese communist aggression by creating an island-chain barrier of pro-western allies off Southeast Asia. It proposed to build a strong coalition by assisting member countries with military development, increased economic stability, and strategic protection. The treaty established a counsel to consult on military matters as they arose. Most importantly, with this treaty the United States finally had a multilateral security alliance that would

¹⁶ Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 40-51. For Eisenhower's account of Dien Bien Phu and united action see, Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 274-84.

ostensibly ensure allied assistance in the event that Washington found itself in conflict with the communists in Southeast Asia.

The ANZUS and SEATO treaties provided the technical rationale which future US administrations cited as they became mired in Vietnam without an official declaration of war. By ratifying both treaties, Congress effectively agreed that in the event of “aggression by armed attack in the Treaty Area,” the United States would “act to meet the common danger.”¹⁷ Congress did not readily give up its constitutional right to declare war, but reluctantly agreed after being assured by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that the wording of the SEATO treaty was used with the understanding that the President would come to Congress in case of a threat of danger “unless the emergency were so great that prompt action were necessary to save a vital interest of the United States.”¹⁸

This new treaty system had several effects on Washington’s Southeast Asian policy. First, the ANZUS treaty created an open relationship with Australia by giving them a voice in policy planning in Southeast Asia. This new dialogue would allow Australia to urge the United States toward greater involvement in the region and would enable the United States to pressure Australia toward troop commitment a decade later. Second, the SEATO Treaty created a multi-lateral security agreement that would be used by Washington hawks to claim an obligatory involvement in South Vietnam and would lead Johnson’s staff to a deluded belief that its allies would also assume that obligation and agree to assist America in the Vietnam conflict.

¹⁷ Department of State, “ANZUS Treaty,” American Foreign Policy 1950-1955, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), 878-80.

¹⁸ Department of State, “Report of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,” Jan 25, 1955, American Foreign Policy 1950-1955, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), 941.

In July 1954 France began its exit from Vietnam by signing the Geneva Accords. Vietnam was partitioned and South Vietnam, led by Ngo Dinh Diem, began transitioning its economic and military reliance away from France toward the United States. With Washington's assistance South Vietnam refused to hold the proposed election in 1956 to reunify the country and Diem began a seven-year campaign of repression in an attempt to solidify his control of South Vietnam. For the remainder of the 1950s, the United States assisted Diem financially and with military advisors to stabilize his control and to resist internal opposition from the emerging National Liberation Front and its allies in Communist North Vietnam who pursued reunification with the South.

During this time, Britain and Australia's attentions turned toward Malaysia and communist insurgents in Indonesia. Washington encouraged British protection of the areas but refused any assistance to Malaysia. The United States felt it was Britain's responsibility and of little significance to its own strategy. For Britain, the Vietnam issue had been settled at Geneva and Malaysia was now the only obstacle to the United Kingdom ending all its commitments East of the Suez. For Australia, Malaysia was the only thing keeping London involved in Southeast Asia and a communist victory in Vietnam, would leave nothing standing between Australia and Communist China.

While Britain and Australia were concerned with Malaysia, Canada began its almost twenty-year entanglement in Vietnam. Under the 1954 Geneva Accords, Canada was appointed a member of the International Control Commission (ICC). The Commission was charged with supervising the application of the agreement. ICC members were to oversee the French evacuation from the North and the Viet Minh withdrawal from South Vietnam by October 20, 1954, and to ensure the free movement of the civilians who

wished to evacuate across the Demilitarized Zone at the 17th parallel. The Commission would ensure that civilians and military personnel from both sides were allowed to move without restriction or violence. Finally, when disputes occurred, the ICC was directed to investigate the problem and make recommendations for a solution. For the remainder of the 1950s, Canada was entangled in this often-ineffectual Commission.¹⁹

In contrast to Canadian peacekeeping efforts in Vietnam, Washington began a policy of increasing support to Saigon through military advisors and equipment to the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) so that by 1963, the United States had 16,000 “advisory” personnel in South Vietnam. The Kennedy administration was primarily responsible for the increase in American personnel and was indirectly responsible for the coup that led to Diem’s assassination in November 1963. Following the coup, a series of new leaders attempted to govern South Vietnam and to save the country from the National Liberation Front Viet Cong- a guerrilla insurgency group originally formed to challenge South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and who were later supported by the North Vietnamese Communists. By November 22, 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and Vice President Lyndon Johnson took the oath to become President, the United States was heavily invested in South Vietnam, the Saigon Government was in complete disarray, and the international community was beginning to question American objectives in Vietnam.²⁰

¹⁹ Paul Bridle, Behind the Headlines: Canada and the International Commission in Indochina, 1954-1972 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1973), 1-7; Edelgard Mahant and Graeme S. Mount, Invisible and Inaudible in Washington: American Policies Toward Canada (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 40-2.

²⁰ Brain VanDeMark, Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4-10.

Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam

Just two days after Lyndon Johnson became President, he met with his top advisors as well as US Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge and Central Intelligence Director John McCone for an assessment of the situation in Vietnam. Lodge reported that since the coup removed Diem, the situation in Saigon had improved and he believed that new leader Duong Van Minh would “speed up their war efforts.” McCone’s assessment was more critical of the new Saigon Government. He informed the President of an increase in Viet Cong activity since the coup and said that the military leaders under Minh were disorganized and were having difficulties with civilian leaders. Johnson decided Washington “had to help the new government get on its feet and perform effectively.”²¹

Johnson then heard a briefing on the Honolulu meeting of Kennedy’s top advisors, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and National Security Adviser MacGeorge Bundy, held days earlier. The discussion was a “modestly encouraging assessment of prospects in Vietnam.” The participants in the Honolulu meeting emphasized that it was important to have “a unified [international] team and that there be the fullest consultation among them.” This was the first mention of what would become the more flags campaign the following summer.²²

Starting with the President’s November 26, 1963, decisions to continue with the Kennedy administration’s Vietnam policies, Johnson firmly set America on a course of an ever-increasing commitment into a seemingly endless and un-winnable struggle.

²¹ Lyndon Baines Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 43-44.

²² Ibid., 44-45.

During the first half of 1964, Johnson was hesitant to use American force in Vietnam and instead chose to increase support for the successive regimes in Saigon and to enlarge the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). This hesitation stemmed from the fact that Johnson knew that any combat commitment would be unpopular. Over the next year, Johnson hoped to secure congressional approval of his Great Society program and then to get re-elected in the fall. An unpopular war in which the United States had no allies would threaten those plans. The President knew he needed both to bolster international support and to devise a strong rationale for action in Vietnam before committing troops. The problem was most of America's traditional allies, with the exception of Australia, were openly opposed to a widening of the conflict and without a strong, stable government in Saigon, the prospect of changing any minds seemed grim.

On January 30, 1964, Duong Van Minh was overthrown and the United States was forced to back yet another government under Major General Nguyen Khanh. Henry Cabot Lodge was once again optimistic, believing the new leadership was capable of turning South Vietnam around. The coup left others in Washington more skeptical of South Vietnamese viability. The Joint Chiefs wanted to increase the U.S. military presence in Vietnam and to start cross-border operations in Cambodia. Others, such as Senator Mike Mansfield, journalist Walter Lippmann, and Senator Wayne Morse were pushing for negotiations and United Nations assistance.²³ Johnson held fast to his policy of support for Saigon because he "thought they needed and deserved understanding and patience."²⁴

²³ William J. Duiker, U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 311-13.

²⁴ Johnson, Vantage Point, 65.

By March, the President's patience was ebbing so he decided to send US Ambassador to South Vietnam Maxwell Taylor and Secretary of Defense McNamara to Vietnam to evaluate the situation. The resulting McNamara-Taylor Report described the deteriorating situation but rejected the idea of withdrawal. It recommended strengthening the Republic of South Vietnam (RVN) without sending US combat troops which might trouble America's allies. Johnson agreed that the United States should support South Vietnam and develop a strong military and political base for possible future action.²⁵

President Johnson was in a precarious position regarding Vietnam. By April 1964, the Saigon Government had experienced three coups, the South Vietnamese military was performing badly at best and the North Vietnamese had steadily increased their infiltration of the south at a very efficient rate. In most situations, these negative aspects, coupled with the lack of any readily apparent economic or strategic significance of South Vietnam to the United States would have turned an administration away, but in the setting of the cold war and the fear of being accused of losing another China, Johnson did not believe he could walk away from the problem.

Added to the internal Vietnamese problems was the increased questioning of American Vietnam policy by key members of the Congress. Among the most prominent critics was Senator Wayne Morse, who in the spring of 1964 filled over two hundred pages of the *Congressional Record* with speeches critical of the Vietnam conflict. At the same time, conservative members of Congress were criticizing the Johnson administration for not prosecuting the war more vigorously.²⁶

²⁵ Duiker, U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina , 311-13.

²⁶ Robert Mann, A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 322-24.

Johnson invited congressional leaders to the 526th meeting of the National Security Council on April 3, 1964, to brief them on the current situation in Vietnam. Secretary of Defense McNamara summarized policy alternatives which included the possibility of “broadening the military campaign by taking the war to other areas, such as the North,” and the possibility of increasing the present program of assistance. The administration chose the later.²⁷

The Senators had several concerns with the proposed course. Senator Leverett Saltonstall asked if any US soldiers would be fighting or whether they would remain advisory. Secretary McNamara assured him that they would remain only advisory. Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen then asked about the viability of using SEATO but was told by Senate Majority leader Mike Mansfield that it was only a “paper tiger.” Mansfield questioned the accuracy of the press reports from Saigon and the conditions of the current government but was informed by McNamara that the real situation was “quite different from that appearing in the press.” Finally, Senator Hubert Humphrey wanted an estimate on what this new enlarged policy would cost and whether the Vietnamese would execute the new program. McNamara responded that he “doubted that there was a problem” and then gave him an approximate estimate that the cost would exceed \$50 million.²⁸

Senator Morse was also present at the meeting and disagreed with the entire South Vietnamese program. He asserted that Washington should have used SEATO and the UN

²⁷ Summary Record of the 526th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, April 3, 1964, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. I, Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 222-24.

²⁸ Ibid.

to achieve a peaceful settlement. The President assured Morse that he would not have to be associated with any of the decision made by his administration toward Vietnam.²⁹

As it became more apparent that the increasing instability in Saigon was pushing America toward intervention without international support or domestic approval, on April 22, 1964, Secretary Rusk recommended, “We need to get more flags flying in South Vietnam. We need to help persuade other countries to provide assistance to Vietnam, not only for the value of assistance, but also because of its importance to Vietnamese morale.”³⁰ The next day, on April 23, President Johnson announced at a press conference that he hoped we would see more flags in Vietnam. The President and the State Department began the more flags campaign in the hope of bolstering diplomatic support for Saigon and increasing allied backing in the event of United States intervention. It was becoming evident that the United States would eventually have to step in and take a more active role in Vietnam. Many of Johnson’s advisors had been advocating such a step for months. It was also evident that the administration would face great criticism if it did so.

Secretary of State Rusk initiated the new policy by sending a joint State-Defense Message to the Australian Embassy on May 7, 1964. He outlined the situation in Southeast Asia and encouraged a high level approach to the Australia Government on assistance to Vietnam. Rusk asserted that “the countries of Southeast and Southwest Asia are the first line of defense” for Australia and that an expanded effort of assistance to Southeast Asia would “provide concrete evidence of the Government of Australia’s sincere desire to maintain political integrity and independence of theses nations.” Rusk

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Summary Record of the 528th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, April 22, 1964, 4:45 p.m., Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. 1, Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 258.

encouraged Canberra to increase support for Malaysia as well and thereby reduce the possibility of Malaysia turning to the United States for assistance. The Secretary urged Australia to offer more military assistance with the promise that it would result in a “broader US-Australian discussions.” Rusk’s vague language played on Canberra’s well-known desire to increase its level of influence on Washington policy decisions while not committing to any formal offer of exchange.³¹

Two weeks later, it was decided that Rusk would make a trip to Vietnam to assess Saigon’s needs. Following his trip, the Secretary endorsed Johnson’s call for allied assistance. On May 18, 1964, in a State Department telegram, Rusk said he returned with the “conviction that it is important for more nations of the Free World to ‘show their flags’ in Vietnam.” Rusk inadvertently exposed the anxiety in Washington over the lack of support when he added “the nature and amount of the contribution being sought are not for the present as significant as the fact of their being made.”³²

Rusk’s telegram also revealed Washington’s misguided belief that its SEATO allies would come to America’s assistance. The Secretary cited a SEATO communiqué from the April SEATO meeting in Manila in which it was stated, “the Counsel agreed that the members of SEATO should remain prepared... to take further steps...in fulfilling their obligations under the treaty.” As would become evident over the next few years, not all of the SEATO members were as prepared to act as Washington hoped.³³

³¹ Dean Rusk, Department of State Telegram, May 7, 1964, NSF, COF: Asia & the Pacific, Australia, box 233 (1 of 2), doc. 1, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX, hereafter cited as LBJL.

³² State Department Circular Telegram, May 18, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 4, Folder 2, doc. 110 LBJL.

³³ Ibid., LBJL

While Washington was envisioning military support, the SEATO contributions that were given came mainly in token economic medical and advisory aid. Of the Commonwealth members, Australia alone offered combat personnel. Britain resisted any discussion of combat forces but did agree to send some counter-insurgency advisors. Canada refused any help on the grounds that their membership on the ICC precluded involvement but consented to conveying negotiation messages to Hanoi via its Commission membership. Canada was also contributing \$1,500,000 to South Vietnam through the Colombo plan to fund technical assistance, food supplies and funding for the university of Hue, but Ottawa believed that any other assistance would jeopardize Canada's role in the ICC.³⁴ The United States elected to continue conversations with the Commonwealth and to assess the situation further.

By early June, President Johnson began to worry that the United States was moving too rapidly toward war. Johnson decided to use Canadian member of the ICC, J. Blair Seaborn, to convey his first peace overtures to North Vietnam. On June 18, 1964, Seaborn was sent as an intermediary but not an advocate of the United States. He served as a candid, neutral intermediary. The United States requested that Ho Chi Minh abide by the Geneva Accords by keeping his men and supplies out of the South and cutting assistance to the Viet Cong. Seaborn was also told to assure Ho Chi Minh that the United States had no intentions of over throwing the government of North Vietnam or maintaining bases in the South, but was willing to provide both sides with economic development assistance if peace were accepted. Hanoi responded that the United States should withdraw and that a neutral regime should be set up in accordance with the

³⁴ State Department Telegram July 7, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 6, Folder 2, LBJL.

National Liberation Front's (NLF) program in which the country would be reunited under a representative regime led by the NLF. Despite this unsuccessful mission, Seaborn was sent again in August with a similar proposal but received an even less open response.³⁵ Once again, it appeared that a combat commitment might be the only US alternative and America would have to gather a coalition soon or move forward alone.

By July 24, 1964, America's frustration with her allies was becoming evident. Even though the United States had yet to commit officially to sending combat troops, the sense of urgency to do so was weighting heavily on Washington. In a circular telegram to various US embassies, most notably to London and Ottawa, the President expressed his urgent desire to gain assistance from third country sources. Through a personal plea to his ambassadors, Johnson assigned the task of gaining third country contributions and made clear that no other task "precedes this one in its urgency and its significance." The President explained that he was "gravely disappointed by the inadequacy of the actions by our friends and allies" and regretted their failure to "recognize their share of this responsibility." The ambassadors were charged with reminding the governments of their responsibility as Free Nations to protect the freedom of others, and if necessary, to remind those who owed their freedom to assistance from others that they shared an even larger burden. Johnson hoped to play on the conscience of those nations, most notably Britain, which had received American help during World War II. The ambassadors were directed to exploit the close ties of America's allies by emphasizing, "in the truest sense therefore the allied response to this request is the test of the merit of our alliance."³⁶

³⁵ Johnson, Vantage Point, 67.

³⁶ State Department Circular Telegram, July 24, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 6, folder 2, LBJL.

The decision to commit to combat and the need for third country assistance in Vietnam became more immediate on August 2, 1964, when North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin reportedly attacked the US Destroyer *Maddox*. Two days later the *C. Turner Joy* also reported being under attack. Despite the questionable validity of the second report and the suspicious location of the *Maddox* when the first attack occurred, President Johnson ordered air strikes against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and oil storage facilities. Then on August 7, Johnson asked and received from Congress the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution granting him authority to take all necessary measures to defend US forces in Southeast Asia. Johnson's response to the incident was well received by the majority of Congress and the American public and effectively removed the Vietnam issue from the upcoming presidential election against Republican candidate Barry Goldwater. The only things standing in the way of a full US commitment in Vietnam was Johnson's worry of war costs affecting his Great Society and the fact that the United States still had not secured allied support for the campaign.

Some members of the administration were optimistic that the Tonkin incident would improve the prospects of the more flags campaign. On August 6, the State Department received a telegram from the English Prime Minister expressing Britain's support for "the action taken by the U.S. Government in accordance with the inherent right of self-defense." The Prime Minister did not, however, offer any military support for future actions. He agreed only to help reduce the international tension caused by the attacks.³⁷

For the remainder of 1964, President Johnson and his advisors considered their options. The military wanted to extend the air attacks against North Vietnam.

³⁷ State Department Telegram from Embassy London to Washington, August 6, 1964, NSF, COF: Europe, box 206, doc. 63, LBJL.

Ambassador Taylor argued to hold off on attacks because Saigon was too vulnerable to risk upsetting the North Vietnamese and their allies. Johnson's senior advisors advocated a two-phase plan consisting of limited bombing raids against infiltration routes in Laos and North Vietnam leading into a second phase of a large-scale air offensive against the North. On December 1, 1964, Johnson approved the phase one bombing operations against the infiltration lines in Laos but not against North Vietnam. These strikes proved disagreeable to some of America's allies and hindered overtures to those allies for assistance in South Vietnam. Other allies, such as Australia and Britain, found Washington's response appropriate.³⁸

With this increased threat and looming escalation of bombing, Washington once again looked for allied support. By December, it was ever more apparent that the more flags campaign was failing. In a memo to the President on December 11, 1964, National Security Council Staff Member Michael Forrestal outlined the status of third-country assistance. He focused on six countries he deemed the "best bet for significant additional help." Among those six were Australia and New Zealand. Australia had at that date supplied 167 personnel of whom 80 percent were combat advisors, six aircraft with crew, an eight-man surgical team, and a variety of materiel. Forrestal believed that, despite its prior commitment to Malaysia and its previous loss of two combat advisors in Vietnam, that Australia "can be persuaded to make a significant increase in her contribution to Vietnam."³⁹

³⁸ George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975, 4th ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 143-51.

³⁹ Memorandum to the President, December 11, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 11, folder 2, doc. 173, LBJL.

Forrestal was less optimistic about Britain and Canada. Britain had given economic contributions for education, road building equipment and fishing boats but had only agreed to send seven people for the British advisory mission. London maintained that its position as Co-Chair of the 1954 Geneva Conference precluded its military involvement. The United Kingdom was also heavily burdened in Malaysia without US support. Forrestal argued that a “strong approach” by the President might produce a small amount of economic assistance, but concluded anything more was improbable.

Canada was even less likely to increase support. Through the Colombo Plan, Ottawa had already provided \$1,500,000 in educational, medical and commodity assistance, but refused to move beyond the single person already in Vietnam, and as Forrestal observed, was considering withdrawing from the ICC because they were in “a sour mood.” Forrestal’s recommendation: “do not hit them again.”⁴⁰

Based on the assessment that Australia was the most likely source for additional support, Johnson decided to address Canberra. The President made a direct appeal to Prime Minister Menzies in a December 12, 1964, letter in which he emphasized the US need for third country assistance and that Australian support would be greatly appreciated. The Prime Minister responded on December 18, 1964, that, while Canberra could not meet all of the requested supplies and advisors, further contributions were “already in prospect” and the United States had Australia’s continued support.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Memorandum to the President, December 11, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 11, folder 2, doc. 173, LBJL.

⁴¹ Letter From Prime Minister Menzies to President Johnson, December 18, 1964, NSF, Head of State Correspondence, box 1, Australia-Menzies Correspondence folder, dos. 60a, LBJL.

United States Escalation

On February 6, 1965, the U.S. Army advisers' barracks and Army Helicopter base at Pleiku was attacked, killing nine Americans and injuring over one hundred. At the same time the Soviet Chairman Aleksei Kosygin was visiting Hanoi. That night the President gathered his advisors and several members of the Foreign Relations Committee to discuss America's alternatives. The resulting decision was an air strike against four targets in North Vietnam. America's Commonwealth allies responded according to their previous positions on the conflict. British Parliamentary discussions showed that most in England felt that the bombings would produce a dangerous political stalemate in which neither side would agree to a cease-fire on the others' terms. It was believed that the best solution would be for the United States and Russia to break the stalemate with the "UK spurring them on."⁴²

On March 2, the Johnson administration instituted air strikes as a set policy of gradual and steady reprisal directed against North Vietnam. The air campaign was known as Rolling Thunder.⁴³ The first American ground troops arrived on March 8, 1965, when two marine battalions were deployed to guard the air base at Danang. On March 17, General William Westmoreland, the US Commander in Vietnam, requested permission to land marines at Hue. Ambassador Maxwell Taylor agreed with the request and told President Johnson, "We will soon have to decide whether to try to get by with indigenous

⁴² Telegram from Embassy London to State Department, February 17, 1965, NSF, COF: Europe, box 206, doc. 128, LBJL.

⁴³ Johnson, Vantage Point, 121-32.

forces or to supplement them with Third Country troops, largely if not exclusively U.S.”⁴⁴

British reaction to this new bombing strategy was mixed. Many in London felt that the bombing was going too far and that America needed to pull out. Others were reluctant to alienate Washington by criticizing the move and hoped that negotiations might ensue despite the increased level of violence. American Ambassador to London David Bruce reported on March 5 that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had met with him to discuss the new bombings. They affirmed that, “there is no question of the continuing loyal support of the British Government for the US in South Vietnam.” They went on to contend that, “our tactical position and theirs would be much stronger if [the United States] demonstrated initiative toward negotiations.”⁴⁵ Three weeks later, London remained committed to its position. On March 25, 1965, the British Foreign Secretary stated, “Britain wholly supports American action in Vietnam... we do believe that in the military situation the United States... must strike at North Vietnam.” He went on to state, “but that does not remove the necessity of trying to seek every reasonable way of bringing the conflict to an end.”⁴⁶

In late March, Viet Cong forces attacked the American Embassy in Saigon with explosives, killing two Americans and injuring several more including Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson. Shortly after, on April 1 and 2, the President and his advisors including Ambassador Taylor met to formulate the next step for Vietnam. The

⁴⁴ Johnson, Vantage Point, 138-39.

⁴⁵ Bruce Telegram to State Department, March 5, 1965, NSF, COF: Europe, box 207, doc. 68, LBJL.

⁴⁶ Telegram from Embassy London to State Department, March 25, 1964, NSF, COF: Europe, box 207, vol. III, doc. 46, LBJL.

President authorized the deployment of two more Marine battalions and one Marine air squadron and an additional 18,000 to 20,000- man support force. He also approved a change in the combat status of the Marines to a “more active role.” According to Johnson’s memoirs, this did not mean an unlimited combat role but rather approved aggressive patrolling and limited counterinsurgency operations near the Marine bases.⁴⁷

When these escalations proved unsuccessful, Johnson asked Secretary Rusk on April 20 to organize a conference of Washington officials, and members of the Mission in Saigon and the Pacific Command in Honolulu to reassess the situation. The resulting report suggested the best possible outcome would be to increase military and psychological warfare to pressure the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and Viet Cong to accept a political solution. LBJ’s advisors estimated that it could take up to two years, recommended a buildup of an additional 33,500 American troops and suggested the South Vietnamese ask Australia and South Korea for additional soldiers. President Johnson approved portions of the Honolulu Conference’s recommended increase, agreeing to send the 173rd Airborne Brigade and the 3rd Marine Amphibious Brigade, thus increasing U.S. forces in Vietnam to over 50,000. These troops were allowed to patrol near bases in conjunction with South Vietnamese troops.⁴⁸

At this point, Washington had a clear idea that Australia was the only Commonwealth member willing to provide military assistance in Vietnam. In a meeting in Secretary of State Rusk’s office on April 13, Australian Ambassador Waller announced Canberra’s decision to supply one battalion for service in South Vietnam. Rusk was appreciative and

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 140-41.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 141-43.

told the ambassador “the battalion would be worth many times its numbers both on the ground and in terms of its effect on public opinion in the World and in the United States.”⁴⁹ On April 29, Prime Minister Menzies publicly announced Canberra’s decision to deploy one infantry battalion to South Vietnam. His statement made it clear that Australia was acting at the request of Saigon and that the battalion would collaborate as necessary with the United States.⁵⁰

The British remained adamantly opposed to military involvement. By April even the President had resigned himself to the idea that the United Kingdom’s only role would be to aid in possible negotiations. Prime Minister Wilson provided a clear appraisal in his account of an April 15 meeting with Johnson: “apart from an occasional moment in future years when President Johnson revived the notion of British military presence in Vietnam, these April talks set out a division of function.” Thereafter, the Americans would continue to fight in Vietnam and the British would continue initiating peace talks.⁵¹

With the increased troop commitment and the continued bombing of the North, Washington experienced high levels of criticism at home and abroad. In his April 15 meeting with British Prime Minister Wilson, Johnson indicated his willingness to reinstitute negotiations. Once again the Prime Minister urged the President to halt the bombing as a gesture of his sincerity. After obtaining Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler’s opinion that a pause would not cause serious harm,

⁴⁹ Memorandum of Conversation of visit Ambassador Waller with Rusk, State Department, April 13, 1965, NSF, COF: Australia, box 233 (1 of 2), doc. 91a, LBJL.

⁵⁰ State Department telegram to American Embassy Canberra, April 28, 1965, NSF COF, Asia & Pacific, box 233 (1 of 2), doc. 12, LBJL.

⁵¹ Harold Wilson, A Personal Record: The Labour Government, 1964-1970 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 96.

Johnson agreed to an eight-day bombing pause on May 10 and on a peace overture to Hanoi. By May 18, the President had no response and therefore resumed the bombing.⁵² For the next month, the United States continued its Rolling Thunder campaign and its patrolling with the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN).

It was not until June that President Johnson granted General Westmoreland, the authority to commit US troops to combat “independently of... the Vietnamese.” On June 27, 1965, the first major ground combat operation by U.S. forces commenced when the 173rd Airborne brigade went into combat north of Saigon.⁵³ With a small coalition consisting of a few Southeast Asian countries and only one Commonwealth member, the United States officially entered the ground war in Vietnam. Washington would continue to search for more flags with minimal results.

⁵² Johnson, Vantage Point, 141-43

⁵³ Ibid., 141-43.

CHAPTER 2

AUSTRALIA AND THE VIETNAM WAR

While Washington was encountering opposition to its entry into the Vietnamese conflict from the majority of its allies, the United States received overt encouragement from the Australians. With the Japanese ease in occupying Southeast Asia during World War II that enabled them to threaten Australia from close proximity, Canberra became painfully aware that the island nation's security was directly linked to the stability and security of the region. Australia did not have a large military or the budgetary ability to increase their military in the event of a crisis. Therefore, Australia's post-war goal was to initiate military alliances with its neighbors and with stronger nations to ensure a pro-western military presence in the area at least until they could build their military sufficiently to ensure their own security.

One of Australia's first and most important decisions was deciding which major power to court most aggressively. Traditionally, Australia had looked toward Britain, but given its new commitment to NATO and its financial constraints following World War II, Britain's ability to provide strong and reliable protection in the Pacific region appeared doubtful. The United States was obviously more capable of providing a strong and forceful presence in the South Pacific, but Canberra was also aware that Washington intended to push for a treaty and a strong alliance with Japan.

Security Alliance Building

The outbreak of the Korean War again drew attention to the communist threat in the South Pacific. The United States decided that the only way to ensure a pro-western Japan would be to allow it to rebuild its economy and for the America military to safeguard the island against the Soviet and Chinese threat. With the memory of Japanese aggression in World War II still fresh, Australia disagreed with America's leniency and strongly supported a firmer, more restraining treaty with Japan. In September 1950, knowing that the United States would have its way on the Japanese issue, Australian Minister of External Affairs Percy Spender sought a security alliance with Washington in exchange for Australia's support for the Japanese treaty.⁵⁴ To facilitate Australia's acquiescence on the Japanese issue, the United States agreed to a security alliance with Australia and New Zealand which would effectively become an extension of an already understood security promise by Washington to its South Pacific friends. While Australia, New Zealand, and the United States treaty (ANZUS) had no provisions for a military planning organization and remained only a civilian consultative body, the agreement laid the foundation for Australia's heavy reliance on American military support in its future external policies. This reliance left Australia obligated to the United States when it took on the struggle against the communists in Vietnam.

American courtship of Australian support for its Vietnam policy began before the United States was fully committed to the conflict itself. In 1953, prior to the commencement of the Geneva Conference, the Eisenhower administration began weighing its options if the French decided to withdraw from Vietnam. In an NSC meeting in March 1953, it was agreed that the United States would have to have allied support if it

⁵⁴ Gregory Pemberton, All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 21-24.

were to take over the French responsibility. Eisenhower and his advisors speculated that ANZUS could be expanded to gain allied help in any future Vietnamese conflict as long as the United States agreed to assure the primary military burden. The use of ANZUS was not pursued at this time, but the NSC meeting did result in a consensus that the United States should work to ensure a mutual defense system in Southeast Asia.⁵⁵ After the Geneva Accords were signed, America's interest in Vietnam intensified. By September 1954, the United States began to look past the French and start easing them out. Washington feared another country in Asia falling to communism and explored all avenues to bolster Vietnam without direct US involvement.

Australia had even greater anxiety over the Geneva Agreement. Canberra was acutely aware of the geographical closeness of Communist China and did not want another communist regime even closer. In April 1964, Labour Party Leader Arthur Calwell told an audience at Darwin that communism was now 350 miles from Australia and was creeping further south. Australians were readily applying the Domino Theory, so popular in American rhetoric. Calwell criticized the Geneva Agreement as an attempt to save Europe by sacrificing Asia. Many in Canberra understood their strategic dependence on European allies and were frustrated with other Commonwealth countries for not sympathizing more with the security problems of Southeast Asia. County Party Minister H. L. Anthony evoked the images of the appeasement of Munich by comparing British attitude toward Communist China to policies of the 1930s.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Pemberton, Australia's Road to Vietnam, 40-41.

⁵⁶ Peter Edwards, Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965 (Sydney: Allen and Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1992), 149.

This worry led Canberra to work for more security in the region. Historian Peter Edwards asserts that Australia developed a goal of quadripartite planning. The objective was an agreement between Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States to share in defense planning for Southeast Asia, with an equal and ongoing dialogue among all the members.⁵⁷ When Washington proposed organizing SEATO, Australia saw its opportunity. Canberra readily signed the treaty knowing that membership could lead to a request for troop contributions if the signatories agreed to any military action in the treaty region. The treaty did not automatically require such participation but did create an obligatory feeling in Australia to contribute in the event the United States decided to intervene in Vietnam. Signing SEATO would satisfy Washington's desire to ensure future action against communist aggression in the region and offered Australia the three things it most wanted: a firm commitment by the United States to the security of Southeast Asia, a way to keep Britain involved in Malaysia, and a security arrangement in which Australia had an ostensibly equal partnership with other European and Western powers.⁵⁸

The Communist Threat in Southeast Asia

In the decade following the Geneva Conference, Australia's attention turned to Indonesia and Malaysia. Following the establishment of a provisional constitution and independence, Indonesia was riddled with factionalism. Between the 1950 declaration of independence and 1965 coup, which replaced President Achmed Sukarno, Indonesia was

⁵⁷ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 168.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 153-54.

consumed with factional struggles among the Army, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and Sukarno. By late 1957, Sukarno had contained most of the opposition but still had to maintain the balance between the PKI and the army.⁵⁹

At the same time, the former British colony of Malaya posed another concern for Australia. Beginning in 1949, the Federation of Malaya, comprised of 35 percent Chinese population, began fighting a communist –led insurrection. After gaining independence in 1957, Malaya continued to struggle against the communist minority and to face economic and security troubles. In 1961, in an attempt to relieve itself of its formal empire in Southeast Asia and to stabilize Malaya, the United Kingdom, along with Malayan Prime Minister Abdul Rahman Putra, proposed the formation of a Malaysian Federation which would include Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei. Indonesia President Sukarno opposed the formation because he believed Britain’s intention was not to grant independence but to control Malaysia as an economic satellite. Sukarno was a strong nationalist committed to eliminating all European colonialists from Southeast Asia through a policy he called *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation). Sukarno declared a “Confrontation” against Malaya in an attempt to stop the formation of the federation and to force England to abandon its Southeast Asian possessions. The resulting struggle led to major British involvement in Southeast Asia and pressure on the Australian Government to provide a battalion to support Britain in Malaya.⁶⁰

Australia also had to consider the ramification of British decline during the 1950s. Britain’s struggling, post-war economic capabilities left it overextended geopolitically.

⁵⁹ Matthew Jones, Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965: Britain, the United States and the Creation of Malaysia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3-12.

⁶⁰ John Subritzky, Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand Diplomacy in the Malaysia-Indonesian Confrontation, 1961-5 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 41-45.

During the decade following Geneva, Britain reassessed its capabilities and determined to end its commitments to all places 'East of Suez' and to find ways to improve its economic situation by applying for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). Britain and Australia turned to the United States for assistance in Malaysia and Indonesian, but Washington was unwilling to become embroiled with this newly de-colonized area.⁶¹ At a meeting with the British Prime Minister and the Australian Ambassador in February 1964, Secretary Rusk expressed the opinion that the United States could not publicly indicate displeasure with Sukarno's action because it would "destroy our leverage with Sukarno and in no way contribute to a peaceful settlement." Washington preferred to stay in constant contact with Sukarno, to "lay down the law" with him.⁶² Thus, it was left to the Commonwealth partners to stabilize the region. This placed a great strain on Australian resources and worried Canberra that the absence of a committed and powerful pro-western ally in the region could leave Australia vulnerable.

By 1962, Canberra had begun reassessing its defense policy. Australia was geographically close to communist China and the turbulent regions of Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. It had a small and already taxed military with nearly no extra personnel for use in its own defense. Canberra had historically denied defense planners budgetary increases and Australia's allies were urging more assistance for Southeast Asian defense. The Australian Department of Defense determined that the best policy for Australian security would be a forward defense strategy. The plan involved containing the enemy forces as far from Australia as possible. The Defense Committee wanted to extend the

⁶¹ Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1988), 61-63.

⁶² Supplemental Briefing: US-UK-Aust-NZ meeting, February 11, 1964, NSF, COF: Europe and USSR, UK, box 213, doc 13d, LBJL.

nation's "strategic interests to Southeast Asia as the center and closest part of the allied defense line extending from Pakistan to Japan." To do this required keeping Great Britain engaged in Malaysia and Indonesia. Because the United States was unwilling to consider military assistance to Indonesia, when Washington began to show concern for South Vietnam in October 1961, Canberra pushed American involvement there. Australia began a rapid build-up of the military to a level that could provide security in the event that Britain and the United States retreated from the area. Unfortunately, budgetary problems left such an escalation unlikely until 1970. Thus, Australia's immediate goal remained keeping the two larger allies in the region until at least 1970.⁶³

By October 1961, Washington had received enough reports from South Vietnam to conclude that Saigon would need assistance from third country sources. The civil war in Laos was about to be resolved in Geneva and the United States believed that Vietnam was the next target for the communists. Discussion began in Washington to assist the South Vietnamese regime under Diem. Kennedy agreed to financial assistance and began sending advisory troops, but decided to hold off on any further commitment until a multilateral agreement through SEATO could be reached. On November 11, Rusk and McNamara recommended that for political reasons, "it would seem important to involve forces from other nations alongside the United States. Our position would be greatly strengthened if the introduction of forces could be taken as a SEATO action."⁶⁴ Their focus was on the Commonwealth members because they held the most diplomatic respect among the US public and domestic politicians. Australia was very receptive to the idea.

⁶³ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 247.

⁶⁴ Draft Memorandum for the President, November 8, 1961, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 561-66.

After a series of negotiations, on December 19, 1961, Australia agreed to supply arms and ammunition and a small number of advisers. This marked the introduction of Australian military personnel into South Vietnam. While small in number- mainly because Australian forces were already committed to Malaysia which seemed more threatening to Australia at the time- the Americans took it as a much needed approval of its commitment to sustaining South Vietnam. For Australia, their meager offer helped to sustain Washington's interest in the region.⁶⁵

Over the next two years, the United States, with the help of allies such as Australia, provided economic and military advisory assistance to the Diem regime of Saigon. It was hoped that through military training and economic encouragement that the Diem regime could solidify its power, expel the communist controlled Viet Cong from the south, and build a strong enough military to stave off North Vietnamese Communist aggression. Those hopes faded when it became evident to the American delegation in Saigon that the Diem regime would not implement much needed reforms and that public support for Diem had declined. When Diem was deposed and assassinated in a coup during the first week of November 1963, Washington and Canberra began rethinking their strategy.

Australia was shocked to learn of Diem's fate. Many in Canberra believed that the military situation in Vietnam had improved and that the strategic hamlet operation was going reasonably well. Following the coup, Australia took its cue from Washington and chose to place its faith in the new Saigon Government. Mainly this was the result of Australia's preoccupation with the new "Confrontation" in Malaysia. The Australian Cabinet knew that the situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating and that pressure for assistance would be coming. However, with its commitment to Malaysia, Australia chose

⁶⁵ Pemberton, Australia's Road to Vietnam, 145-49.

to wait for an American decision before offering an increase in involvement. That decision did not come until April of 1964 when the Americans implemented its more flags campaign.

Australia's Decision to Commit Troops

Australia turned most of its attention to Indonesia in the first months of 1964. However, when the various British and UN peace proposals for Vietnam were presented to the United States in the spring, Australia became alarmed. Canberra did not want the United States to negotiate its way out of Vietnam before Australia had enhanced its own military. With the United Kingdom pushing to resolve the Indonesian "Confrontation" and withdraw from Southeast Asia within six years, Canberra needed the insurance of a strong American presence in the area to maintain security. Australia pushed Washington to reject any negotiations until the war turned more in Saigon's favor and South Vietnam could enter into negotiations from a position of strength. The Australians hoped this would keep the United States in Vietnam for several years.⁶⁶

In May 1964, the U. S. State Department issued another plea to Canberra for increased assistance as part of its more flags campaign. Reminding Australia of the importance of Southeast Asian security, the United States requested more economic and logistical aid to both Vietnam and Thailand. Combat forces were not mentioned, but a call for all other support was intended to enable the American forces to be "reoriented and concentrated in projects of a purely military nature."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 335-36.

⁶⁷ Telegram, Rusk to American Embassy Canberra, May 7, 1964, NSF, COF: Asia and the Pacific, box 233 (1 of 2), Vol. I, doc. 1, LBJL.

Australia continued to provide as much economic assistance as it could but was unable to supply many of the items that American desired. Canberra considered sending combat forces even though they were not requested and continued to give the United States public support and encouragement. Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Australia fully endorsed Washington's retaliatory bombing. Minister of the Department of External Affairs Paul Hasluck stated, "It is our hope that the restrained but determined actions of the United States will have a strong deterrent effect on the aggressor." He also reiterated Canberra's intent to assist in the defense of Southeast Asia against the Communists.⁶⁸

For the next few months, while Washington contemplated future limited bombing of North Vietnam, Johnson pushed to recharge the State Department's effort to gain more flags. Following an assessment of the more flags campaign's progress, the President increased the pressure on America's more willing allies. On December 12, 1964, Johnson sent a letter to Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies requesting additional combat support for the actions that the United States planned to take. While official Washington was to maintain its current policy of backing the Saigon regime with economic and advisory assistance, Johnson and his staff were developing other options which included a possible increase in bombing of North Vietnam and an introduction of American combat forces. The President was not ready to commit to this escalation but wanted to know what type of international support he could expect if he chose to escalate.⁶⁹ The letter emphasized the need for Americans to "understand they are not alone in the defense of the freedom of a country which is geographically so far away," and thanked the

⁶⁸ Pemberton, Australia's Road to Vietnam, 210-11.

⁶⁹ Mann, A Grand Delusion, 371-77.

Minister for the assistance Australia had provided thus far. Johnson continued, "I cannot exaggerate the importance of any enlarged efforts in Vietnam which you are able to make." Johnson listed the contributions that America most needed from Australia, including 200 additional combat advisors, minesweepers, and non-military aid. The President ended with a personal overture to Menzies, asserting that he was aware of the difficulty this request would create, but "I would not make this request as an American President to an Australian Prime Minister if I were not sure both that the problem is urgent and that I am writing to a strong and determined friend."⁷⁰

Prime Minister Menzies responded on December 18, 1964, with a guarded but still favorable response. The Prime Minister explained that Australia was unable to send the 200 requested combat advisors because they were needed in Australia to train its new conscripts. They were also lacking many of the requested vessels and the few they did possess were already engaged in other areas. Menzies assured the President that the non-military requests were "already in prospect" and reiterated that Australia intended to "continue to support you and you can be assured of our wish to do whatever lies within our physical capacity."⁷¹

Following the exchange of letters between President Johnson and Prime Minister Menzies, the Office of External Affairs considered whether Australia should send a battalion to South Vietnam "in order to obtain some forward momentum in American policy formulation."⁷² Some members feared that the commitment of combat forces

⁷⁰ Letter From President Johnson to Prime Minister Menzies, December 12, 1964, NSF, Head of State Correspondence, box 1, Australia-Menzies Correspondence folder, doc. 62. LBJL.

⁷¹ Letter From Prime Minister Menzies to President Johnson, December 18, 1964, NSF, Head of State Correspondence, box 1, Australia-Menzies Correspondence folder, dos. 60a, LBJL.

⁷² Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 339-40.

could have negative consequences. Domestic opposition to Australian involvement in South Vietnam was growing and there were concerns among several Cabinet members that the instability of the Saigon Government would only lead to a protracted involvement. There were others who worried that the decision would tie Australian credibility and security to American action only to have Washington agree to the proposed negotiations before Saigon was in a position of strength. Other Cabinet members believed the best way for Australia to keep the United States from the negotiation table was to show support through troop involvement. Ultimately, it was decided to delay the decision until after the anticipated military staff talks with the United States but to confirm in the interim that Australia would give public support for increased bombing of North Vietnam.⁷³

When the military staff talks were postponed, Canberra urged Washington to meet with Australian officials in the interim. Washington agreed to meet in early February 1965. Minister of Defense Shane Paltridge was sent to the meetings and instructed by Minister of External Affairs Hasluck to assure Washington that Australia's goal was to "remove any hesitation on the part of the Americans and, within our limited resources, to go with them but not to rush out in front." At this same time, Prime Minister Menzies and Prime Minister Wilson were attending Winston Churchill's funeral and had hoped to talk with President Johnson about a possible four-power conference on joint action on Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and Vietnam. Johnson, however, chose not to attend

⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation of State Department and Ambassador Waller, NSF, COF: Australia, box 233 (1 of 2), Vol. I. Doc. 91a, LBJL.

and Secretary Rusk avoided any serious sessions. Australia remained interested in holding military staff talks, but got no response.⁷⁴

Instead, following Winston Churchill's funeral, Australian Prime Minister Menzies and British Prime Minister Wilson met to discuss Vietnam. Wilson explained to Menzies the pressure he was under from the both the British public and members of his own party to oppose United States policy in Vietnam. He was being urged to reconvene the Geneva Conference to resolve the issue. Wilson assured Menzies that "the British would not make any proposal to refer the matter to Geneva unless and until the United States approved."⁷⁵

Then on February 6, 1965, the Viet Cong launched a series of attacks on US military installations in South Vietnam. The United States responded with Operation Flaming Dart bombing campaign. Australian Minister Paul Hasluck endorsed US action and especially approved attacks on targets related to North Vietnamese infiltration of the South. By February 20, Washington agreed to the military staff talks with Australia to encourage Canberra to send much needed ground troops to help secure the northern regions of South Vietnam near DaNang.⁷⁶ William Bundy prepared a Checklist of Diplomatic Actions on February 9, 1965, that recommended that the United States have "full consultation" with Australia through the Embassy and proposed, "quiet joint planning."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Glen St J. Barclay, A Very Small Insurance Policy: The Politics of Australian Involvement in Vietnam, 1954-1967 (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994), 79-82.

⁷⁵ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 348-49.

⁷⁶ Barclay, Politics of Australian Involvement in Vietnam, 90-92.

⁷⁷ Checklist of Diplomatic Actions to Accompany Proposed Course of Action, prepared by William Bundy, February 9, 1965, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 13, Folder 4, doc. 224b, LBJL.

While Australia officially endorsed the American bombing campaign, internally the Labor Government was conflicted. Some supported American involvement in South Vietnam to counter Communist China. Members such as Deputy Parliamentary Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam wanted to see US involvement increase until Saigon could go to the negotiation table with the advantage. Another group, led by Parliamentary Opposition Leader Arthur Calwell, was critical of an American escalation that could drag Australian troops into a commitment but was still willing to keep Australia's prior promises to Washington. A third group readily endorsed American active involvement in the region, but thought that South Vietnam was the wrong place. Dr. J. F. Cairns, the emerging leader of the left wing of the federal Parliamentary Labor Party, believed that the best prospects for peace would come with an American backed strategic line enforced by air and sea power and running from Australia through the Philippines to Alaska. He endorsed the policy of containment, but did not consider the struggle in Vietnam the result of outside aggression and therefore not the right place for the Western allies to expend their resources. The anxiety across the Australian domestic front over Vietnam obviously mirrored that of the other American allies, but the Australian Government maintained its official pro-American stance in the hope that the United States would sustain its commitment to the region.⁷⁸

Historian Peter Edwards has asserted, Australia and the United States were on parallel but not identical paths regarding Vietnam. Australia's goal was to "reinforce the views of like-minded elements" in America but that in reality, Canberra had little more than "marginal influence on the course of United States policy." He claims that the hawks of

⁷⁸ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 346-47.

the American administration appreciated the public support that Australia was willing to give when America's other allies declined, but that Australian pressure had no real significance to Washington policy decisions.⁷⁹ There were far greater forces driving America toward combat involvement in Vietnam, but Canberra's insistence in the vulnerability of Southeast Asia and Australian official's application of the Domino Theory to the region, helped the hawks in Washington assert their position with more weight.

Throughout February and March 1965, there was another storm of peace proposals from both American allies and communist adversaries. Among the efforts was the British proposal to re-open the Geneva Conference. Australia remained adamantly opposed to negotiations while Saigon was in a vulnerable position. As Britain pushed the Americans harder toward negotiation, the Australians grew more disillusioned with their Commonwealth partner. It was indicative of the deteriorating relationship that Canberra learned of the British overture for negotiations from Washington rather than London. Australian Ambassador to Washington John Keith Waller and External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck worried that Johnson would acquiesce and Australia would lose its influence in Washington. Australia launched a counter diplomatic initiative opposing negotiations. Australian High Commissioner in London, Sir Alexander Downer was directed to urge British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart not to pursue premature negotiations or to try to convince the United States to "surrender their freedom of military action." Then in March, Australian Ambassador to the United Nations David Hay objected to Secretary General U Thant's peace proposal and his insistence that Ho Chi

⁷⁹ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 349-50.

Minh was a nationalist and not a communist and that the confrontation in Vietnam was civil war in which the United States should not be involved.⁸⁰

Prime Minister Menzies reaffirmed the Australian commitment in March when he responded to an anti-war, pro-negotiation letter from Anglican bishops in Australia. Menzies composed a letter that was sent to Washington and London as well as to the bishops in which he unmistakably showed Australia's support for a "forceful United States policy." Menzies accused the communists of repeatedly violating the Geneva Agreements through their "establishment and maintenance" of the Viet Cong who were "determined upon revolution by violence." The letter praised the Americans for their "courageous and generous acceptance of responsibilities for the protection of human freedom" and suggested that the United States should not negotiate with the Viet Cong as they had already proven they would disregard any agreement. While the Prime Minister did not suggest sending Australian troops, his strong language was meant to discourage President Johnson from seeking negotiations and to prepare the way for a possible commitment in the future.⁸¹

Other members of the Menzies Government also spoke out against the negotiation proposals and hoped to discourage the Americans from withdrawing from Southeast Asia. On March 23, External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck stated in Parliament that Vietnam was "not a local rebellion caused by internal discontent but the application of the methods and doctrines of Communist guerrilla warfare first evolved in China." He

⁸⁰ Barclay, Politics of Australian Involvement in Vietnam, 94-98.

⁸¹ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 356.

warned that if Americans withdrew from South Vietnam, it would leave the way open for the Chinese to take Vietnam and then Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and “further.”⁸²

The delayed Military staff talks were finally held in Honolulu on March 30 and April 1, 1965. In a preparatory brief on March 25, Minister of Defense Paltridge directed the Australian delegation to secure detailed information on American plans for military operations and how the United States proposed to deal with the problem of “foreign troops operating on a civil war in which they will have great difficulty in distinguishing friend for foe.”⁸³ The delegates were given vague answers to their inquiry. They were left with the impression that an enclave strategy, in which American forces would be deployed around major US bases with the authorization to conduct offensive operations within a fifty-mile radius of each base, would be implemented and that other countries might be asked to contribute. Australian Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Services Frederick Scherger, head of the Australian delegation, “indicated that Australia would contribute forces to South Vietnam in response to any U.S. request.” On April 5, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Leonard Unger told Australian Ambassador to France Alan Renouf that the United States would deploy three more marine battalions for combat and that Australia should expect an official request for a battalion contribution and another 150 instructors to train the ARVN regional forces.⁸⁴

On April 7, 1965, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee (FAD) met and made the final decision on Australian commitment. The discussion reflected the wide range of

⁸² Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 356.

⁸³ Pemberton, Australia's Road to Vietnam, 208-10.

⁸⁴ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 360. For further explanation of the enclave strategy see, Herring, America's Longest War, 155-60.

opinions running through Canberra. Chairman Scherger told the group that he had been given unconfirmed information that the United States was preparing an enclave strategy and that Washington hoped that Australia would provide at least one battalion. Hasluck wanted to delay until after President Johnson's upcoming speech at Johns Hopkins University to better assess the real U.S. intension. He also feared that Australia was spread too thin in Southeast Asia and should assess the best place to deploy the one battalion available. Opposing Hasluck was Cabinet Minister Harold Holt. The future Prime Minister felt that Australia should give the largest contribution possible regardless of "the final outcome of the United States intervention in Vietnam." Country Party Leader John McEwen, another future Prime Minister, agreed since Australia needed to do everything possible to encourage the Americans to stay in Vietnam. Prime Minister Menzies concurred, because Australian security would be in jeopardy if South Vietnam fell to communism. He anticipated that the psychological effect of Australian aid on their American allies would be advantageous.⁸⁵

The debate also involved the level of commitment that Australia could afford. Menzies warned that pledging a battalion to Vietnam would strain Australia's responsibility to Indonesia. He also worried that deploying another 150 advisors would leave Australia unable to train its new conscripts. He wanted to remind both the United State and Britain that Australia would require assistance for the region if they were to pledge another battalion in Southeast Asia. Defense Minister Paltridge also preferred a clear explanation of the role and location of the battalion's deployment before Australia

⁸⁵ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 361-62.

agreed. Ultimately, the FAD Committee refused the request for an additional 150 advisors but agreed to dispatch a battalion.⁸⁶

Once the decision was made, Australia needed the South Vietnamese Government to formally request the battalion. On April 22, 1965, the State Department notified the American and Australian ambassadors to Saigon that a formal request would be made to South Vietnamese Defense Minister Phan Huy Quat but that no private approaches should be initiated until a final approval was received. Washington approached the Saigon Government delicately because Quat was reluctant to approve additional troops until he was sure “additional forces were needed and because there is a question in his mind as to whether foreign troops are suitable for winking out terrorists among the 14 million people in South Viet-Nam.”⁸⁷ Australia received its formal request after a few discussions between the general and the American and Australian ambassadors.

On April 29, 1965, Prime Minister Menzies officially announced in the House of Representative that Australia would send one battalion to South Vietnam in response to a request from the RVN government. In his speech he told the House, “the takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and Southeast Asia. It must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.”⁸⁸

Australia’s decision to offer a battalion to the struggle in Vietnam was not undertaken lightly. For fifteen years prior to the April 29, 1965, announcement, Canberra had pushed

⁸⁶ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 362.

⁸⁷ Telegram State Department to American Embassy Saigon, April 22, 1965, NSF, COF:Vietnam, box 193, Lodge Mission, doc. 51., LBJL; Memorandum of Conversation, Harold Holt, Secretary Wilson and Waller, April 28, 1965, NSF, COF: Asia and the Pacific, box 233 (1of2), vol. I, doc. 93, LBJL.

⁸⁸ Edwards, Crises and Commitments, 372.

the United States and Great Britain for a stronger presence in the region. The often relentless urging left little room for maneuvering out of a reciprocal offer when the Americans answered their pleas. Australia seemed more concerned with building a strong American-Australian security relationship in the region and with maintaining strong assurance by the United Kingdom than with the actual situation South Vietnam. Most fateful of all, no one in the Australia's successive governments ever questioned America's ability to win the conflict once committed. It was assumed that the US military juggernaut would stop the flow of communism. As Scherger himself said in retrospect, "If one expected America to do anything on our behalf, then we had to do something to show willingness to assist. It never was conceivable to us that America would lose."⁸⁹

Before Australia withdrew from the conflict, Canberra sent another two battalions and endured repercussions at home similar to those felt in Washington. At the height of its involvement in 1967, Australia had over 8,300 troops in Vietnam and lost 494 men. After Prime Minister Harold Holt died in December 1967, the new Prime Minister John Gorton informed President Johnson that no more troop increases would come. By 1969, Canberra began a gradual process of withdrawal that would be completed in December 1971.⁹⁰

Like many other allies, Australians ultimately became disillusioned with the United States. Australia's disappointment was unique in that political opinion was split between the left and right as represented by the left and right wings of the Democratic Labour Party. The Left wing was troubled with the initial engagement and commitment in

⁸⁹ Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 375.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

Vietnam and the validity of US involvement. The Right wing originally favored the war but opposed US disengagement from South Vietnam without providing for a viable government in Saigon.⁹¹ Ultimately, the Australian security relationship with the United States was damaged but not permanently destroyed.

Assessing the decision to commit troops to Vietnam in terms of national security, Australia acted on the assumption that it could not provide adequate security for itself without outside, particularly United States, aid. Faced with a small standing military, a growing threat from China, and the fresh memories of Japanese aggression in World War II, the Australian Government placed great importance on the Domino Theory in both Vietnam and Indonesia. Australian officials, such as Minister of External Affairs Paul Hasluck, believed that American success in Vietnam was vital to Australian security. Only when it became apparent that the United States would not succeed in the war did Australian opinion turn against America. In the end, South Vietnam fell to the communists, but the dominos fell no further. Australian security remained stable and unthreatened by North Vietnamese or Chinese communist aggression.⁹² Like the United States, Australia had misjudged the geopolitical dynamics in Southeast Asia.

⁹¹ Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 69-71.

⁹² Bell, *A Study of Australian Foreign Policy*, 79-85.

CHAPTER 3

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE VIETNAM WAR

While the Vietnam War brought Australia closer to the United States, it forced a greater rift between Washington and the other Commonwealth members. Great Britain had been one of America's closest and most useful allies, but by the time the Johnson administration took over, that partnership was becoming a source of great frustration. The more Washington pressed for troops and public support, the more London turned away.

The escalation of American combat involvement in Vietnam prompted Britain to break its connection with the United States. The Wilson Government refused to send any assistance or reinforcements to help the Americans even in the face of great pressure from President Lyndon B. Johnson and his staff. There were many factors that led to the decision and most were directly associated with Britain's struggle to maintain domestic stability while reasserting its international influence. Domestically, the Wilson Government faced several problems throughout 1964 and 1965. First, there was great disagreement between the leftist members of the Labour Party and the members of the Office of Foreign Affairs over the government's support for American actions. The Leftists strongly urged Wilson to disassociate the government from the United States, placing great pressure on the already weak intra-party coalition. Members such as A.

Kitson and R. Wadsworth presented the Labour Party with several resolutions calling for condemnation of United States intervention in Vietnam.⁹³

Britain's desire to join the European Economic Community (EEC) also influenced Wilson's thinking. Britain had applied for membership in the EEC in 1963 but had been denied entry on the grounds that it was too closely aligned with the United States. French President Charles de Gaulle had asserted that Britain would not put the interests of the European Union before that of America when a conflict arose and therefore should be excluded.⁹⁴ England needed to join the EEC to improve its economic viability and demonstrate its independence from the United States. Britain had relied heavily on the US backing of sterling to stabilize its economy. If England joined the European Community, it could rebuild its economy without such a reliance on the Americans. By disassociating itself from American policy on Vietnam, which the European community condemned, the British could rebut De Gaul's claims of British dependency on the United States.⁹⁵

The Labour Government also had to address the public and parliamentary dissatisfaction with American policy in Vietnam. Incidents of public protests against the "immorality" of US actions in Vietnam- the increased bombing and the use of nerve gas by the South Vietnamese Government- were becoming more frequent, culminating in a teach-in at Oxford University in June 1965. These increasing demonstrations against American war policy posed a serious threat to the slim Labour majority that existed in

⁹³ Labour Party, *Report of the Sixty-Fifth Annual Conference of the Labour Party-1966*. (Great Britain: Labour Party, 1964), 182.

⁹⁴ "Britain and the United States" letter to the editor, *The Times*, in Anglo-American Relations Since 1939: the Enduring Alliance, ed. John Baylis (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 161.

⁹⁵ Richard Crossman, The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister (2 vols.; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), I, 336.

Parliament in 1965. The Wilson Government had won the majority in 1964 by only four seats. Furthermore, opposition within the party itself, especially from the far left who disapproved of what they deemed U.S. imperialism in Vietnam threatened a possible fracture in the Wilson administration's coalition. It was strategically important for Wilson to find a policy that soothed internal discontent and gained the trust of the European community while not severing all ties with its historically important ally, the United States.⁹⁶

Given these contradictory opinions and ongoing economic problems, the Wilson Government decided that the best policy to satisfy all sides would be to deny military assistance to the United States while continuing support through mediation and diplomatic intervention. This would allow Britain to remain sufficiently involved to keep the special relation in tact while not showing support for the highly unpopular military aspects of the conflict.⁹⁷ Still, even this political strategy carried problems. First, it assumed that both the United States and the Vietnamese countries were open to mediation. Second, it assumed that the Wilson government still had the influence necessary to conduct the process. Third, it depended on the correctness of Wilson's belief that the British public would accept his rejection of military involvement as a sufficiently firm stance against the United States. The Prime Minister would discover that his government did not have the necessary influence to bring all parties to the negotiating table and that his efforts would not quiet the growing discontent with America's Vietnam policy in Britain.

⁹⁶ Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 105-8.

⁹⁷ Labour Party, *Report of the Sixty-Fifth Annual Conference*. 90-91.

Britain's Declining International

Standing

Following World War II, Great Britain's international influence as well as its economic power gradually deteriorated due to the instability of its sterling currency and failures of several foreign policy actions such as the Suez crisis of 1956. Assistance and support from the United States had traditionally been important to London's ability to sustain its place in the international arena, but as the British decline became more apparent, England was forced to forge its own path. By loosening the tie with the United States and moving toward a Eurocentric foreign policy, London sought to ensure a new place for Great Britain in international affairs. Applying for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) was critical. Membership would open up new markets for the struggling English economy and enable London to forge a stronger security relationship with its European allies. Also, because of the economic struggles, Great Britain began to recognize the need to lighten its economic burdens by withdrawing from colonies in Africa and the Middle East. As debates over these issues lingered in Parliament, they sent a message to the international community of yet another sign of Britain's slip from world power.

Several things stood in the way of re-aligning British foreign policy. The first was London's pre-existing commitment to Malaysia. Beginning in 1949, the Federation of Malaya began fighting a communist –led insurrection by the Chinese immigrants who comprised about 35 percent of Malaya's population. After gaining independence in 1957, the Federation of Malaya continued to struggle against the communist minority for another three decades.

Meanwhile, Indonesia faced similar problems. The Indonesian national election of 1955 produced no parliamentary party majority and forced President Achmed Sukarno to reform the party system and solidify more control within the presidency to create stability. In October 1956, Sukarno visited the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China and returned with a new policy he called “guided democracy” in which he began to prohibit most political parties and suppress regional factions who posed a threat to the federal government. By March 1957, the last autonomous regional government collapsed and Sukarno declared martial law. Few political parties survived. One notable exception was the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) which in the July 1957 provincial elections on Java became the largest party. It seemed evident to the western allies that Sukarno was willing to use the PKI to solidify his own control. London worried that this left all of Indonesia vulnerable to communist take-over.⁹⁸

Britain knew that its withdrawal from the area would leave Malaya even more vulnerable and could lead to Communist domination of region. It was decided to build up Malaya and the surrounding area to insure the countries could provide their own security. In 1961 the United Kingdom along with the Malaya Prime Minister Abdul Rahman Putra proposed the formation of a Malaysian Federation, which would include Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei, and would create an economic and strategic power structure in the South Pacific. Indonesia President Sukarno opposed the federation. A conflict, termed the “Confrontation”, soon developed between Sukarno and the Malaysian and British military forces. Because Britain became involved in the “Confrontation”, Australia was also persuaded to contribute a battalion which drained its

⁹⁸ Matthew Jones, Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965: Britain, the United States and the Creation of Malaysia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3-12.

military budget and left its military forces over committed. This conflict consumed British forces into the late 1960s and became a source of bitterness between Washington and London. The Americans refused to assist the British with the Confrontation while pushing Britain for assistance in Vietnam. The British argued that if they were expected to carry the burden in Malaysia, the United States should do likewise in Vietnam.⁹⁹

Britain's application to join the EEC also complicated its foreign policy re-alignment. In 1963 Great Britain applied for membership in the EEC. Its application was initially denied because of overly close British relations with the United States. Washington seemed to recognize the British need to lessen its reliance in the United States and to approve a policy that promised to strengthen the European economy and alleviate some of the burden for America. Ironically, this move worried the other Commonwealth members because it placed their preferred trading status with Britain in jeopardy.

British Response to More Flags

By the time the Labour Party regained control of Parliament in 1964, Britain had lost international influence as well as experienced a deterioration in its the relationship with the United States. Prime Minister Harold Wilson faced the task of rebuilding the Labour majority while contending with public and official opposition to his policy of simultaneously defending American action in Vietnam and calling for negotiations. Many backbenchers and left-wing members of the Labour Party pushed Wilson to disassociate the United Kingdom from all American actions and to condemn American escalation and bombing during the first half of 1965. Washington continued to pressure

⁹⁹ Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia*, 3-12.

the Wilson Government to make a more visible military contribution.¹⁰⁰ Wilson was dedicated to securing the “special relationship” while finding alternatives to fighting in the conflict. Ultimately, however, Wilson did not dictate policy. He eventually responded to domestic pressures and declining international status and turned his back on the “special relationship” with the United States. He exerted British independence by refusing to publicly back the United States with troops for Vietnam.

When Washington began to solicit more flags, London’s shifting policy became glaringly clear. In response to his orders to press for more British aid on July 10, 1964, American Ambassador to Britain David Bruce discussed US needs with London. Bruce was told that the Britain should not have to contribute to Vietnam because of its role as Co-Chair of the 1954 Geneva Convention and because they were assuming an anti-communist responsibility in Malaysia without U.S. support. Britain appeared willing to increase its police training force upon GVN request because this would not conflict with British responsibilities under the Geneva Conference. However, London emphasized that it was taking on the burden of Malaysia without Washington’s assistance and therefore London should not be required to support American action in Vietnam. Britain contended it had “exercised restraint in not requesting U.S. [to] show its flag in Malaysia” and that London, “would not regard resumption of US aid to Indonesia as proper quid pro quo for UK assistance to US effort in Vietnam.”¹⁰¹

By August 1964, Britain had provided a five-man advisory mission on counterinsurgency, a £56,000 grant for road building, and agreed to furnish additional

¹⁰⁰ Dockrill, Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez, 105-8.

¹⁰¹ Telegram from Ambassador Bruce to State Department, July 10, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 6, Folder 2, doc. 30, LBJL.

police training advisors. When pressed for further assistance, London reiterated its responsibility as Co-chair of the Geneva Conference and its considerable aid to Malaysia and Laos.¹⁰² Given the British response to US overtures in May 1964, Secretary of State Rusk judged the United Kingdom “preoccupied with Malaysia” and unable to consider anything above the “possibility of providing additional counter-insurgency advisors.”¹⁰³ He decided no more assistance would be forthcoming and it was best not to push for more commitment at that time.

On August 6, 1964, following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the Wilson Government issued a statement supporting the US actions as consistent with the right of self-defense and expressed British determination to “assist reducing the international tension that has inevitably resulted from these North Vietnamese attacks.”¹⁰⁴ Washington mistakenly took this message as a sign of London’s changing attitude and lobbied for more assistance. Another series of overtures were made to London between August and December, but Prime Minister Wilson would go no further than offering to approach the Soviet Union about re-opening the Geneva talks to help bring an end to the escalating hostilities. Johnson chose to delay the Prime Minister for as long as possible in an attempt to avoid peace talks until Saigon could enter from a stronger strategic position.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Memorandum Third Country Aid to Vietnam, August 28, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, vol. XVI., box 7, Folder 6, doc. 143, LBJL.

¹⁰³ Telegram Circular to Embassy From Rusk, May 18, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 4, Folder 6, doc. 8, LBJL.

¹⁰⁴ Telegram from AmEmbassy London to White House, August 6, 1964, NSF, COF: UK, box 206, vol. 1, doc. 63, LBJL.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum of Third Party Assistance August 28, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 7, vol. XVI, doc. 143, LBJL; Checklist of Diplomatic Actions to Accompany Proposed Course of Action, Bundy to the President, February 9, 1965, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 13, Folder 4, Doc. 224b, LBJL

Following the Viet Cong attacks on an American marine base in Pleiku on February 6, 1964, Wilson contacted Moscow proposing that the Soviet Union and Great Britain work together to reconvene the Geneva conventions before the fighting intensified. The Prime Minister received no reply. On February 20, 1965, he urged the Soviets to join Britain in inviting the Geneva participants to assess proposals for a new settlement. This overture received a response on March 15, 1965 in which the Soviets issued their “routine denunciation of the United States and a renewed call for the withdrawal of all American forces and equipment.” The next day the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko arrived in London for prescheduled bilateral talks. In several meetings with Prime Minister Wilson and British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, Gromyko refused any proposal to reinstitute the Geneva Conference until all air attacks in Vietnam ceased and until all parties agreed to involve China.¹⁰⁶

British attempts to re-open the Geneva Conference may have been futile from the beginning. In a memorandum that Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy prepared for the President in February 1965, he recommended the United States should resist negotiations as long as possible. He pointed out that the pressure to negotiate was coming from the United Nations and from individual countries such as the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. He believed that Washington should do everything possible to keep the matter out of the United Nations. If Vietnam were brought before the Security Council, America would be forced to respond. By contrast, when working through a third country proposal such as the British overture, Washington could resist as long as possible by “making clear our objectives and our willingness to work out a constructive solution,” but

¹⁰⁶ Harold Wilson, A Personal Record: The Labour Government 1964-1970 (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971), 79-86.

prolonging the actual negotiations by asserting that “the Communist side is simply not ready to negotiate on reasonable terms.” Bundy believed any conference resulting from the British initiative could be “held off entirely for some weeks” and that if the United States conceded to the pressures for talks, it would still have several weeks to stall while the format of the conferences was negotiated.¹⁰⁷ There was also great concern that any peace initiative involving neutralization of Vietnam with American withdrawal would result in a Communist takeover of the South because Saigon was virtually paralyzed and the National Liberation Front (NLF) had gained too much control over the rural areas for the weakened South Vietnamese to defend.¹⁰⁸

By following Bundy’s suggestions, Johnson gave Wilson the impression that America supported his efforts. The Prime Minister was encouraged to approach the Soviets and when Council Chairman Alexei Kosygin refused to reply, Wilson’s approach was dropped. The lack of positive response from the Soviets and Hanoi allowed the Americans to claim that the North Vietnamese were not willing to negotiate. The US negotiating strategy was more likely intended to pacify public anti-war sentiments and to avoid international pressure to involve the United Nations which might take actions contrary to American objectives. This policy placed the British in a precarious situation and ultimately caused the Wilson Government to lose international credibility.

While the United States placated the British in their futile attempts at peace negotiations, Washington continued to solicit British help on the ground in Vietnam. On March 5, 1965, Ambassador David Bruce reported a meeting he had with the Prime

¹⁰⁷ Checklist of Diplomatic Actions to Accompany Proposed Course of Action, Bundy to the President, February 9, 1965, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 13, Folder 4, Doc. 224b, LBJL.

¹⁰⁸ William Duiker, Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995), 172-75.

Minister Wilson and British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart in which the two expressed the growing concern in the Labour Party over Vietnam. It was the majority sentiment that another initiative toward negotiations would strengthen the Wilson Government's resolve to back the U.S. policy both internally and in the public perception. They argued that further exploration by the British Government, while unlikely to receive a satisfactory response from Hanoi, would improve both governments' standings in the international community and alleviate some of the internal pressure Wilson was facing.¹⁰⁹

On March 23, 1965, Foreign Secretary Stewart visited Washington to discuss Vietnam. He first questioned the reported use of napalm and nerve gas in Vietnam by the South Vietnamese and Americans and warned its unpopularity could result in the loss of world support. The discussion then turned to opening negotiations and the utility of making a public statement to the effect that the United States was willing to return to the negotiating table.¹¹⁰

The American Embassy in London hosted fourteen new Labor MP's on March 24, 1965, for a discussion on Vietnam. Led by Eric Heffer, they expressed the hard left-wing opinion that the United States had "no business in Asia" and that they felt the use of nerve gas and napalm was immoral. Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury Edward Short told the Ambassador that an increasing number of Labor MP's were urging dissociation from the United States due to what they perceived as "lack of evidence that

¹⁰⁹ Telegram from Ambassador David Bruce to the President, March 5, 1965, NSF, COF: UK, box 207, UK Cables vol. III, doc. 68, LBJL.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation Secretary Stewart and Secretary Rusk, March 23, 1965, NSF, COF: UK, box 207, UK Memos vol. III, doc. 148, LBJL.

US is willing to negotiate.” Short asserted that Washington should “take a more positive attitude on negotiations.”¹¹¹

The Vietnam War was also a topic of the April 1, 1965, Parliamentary Debates. Wilson found it surprisingly easy to contain the left-wing anti-war opposition, with only a few backbenchers questioning the use of chemical weapons by the Americans. Most who spoke that day expressed support for U.S. defense of Vietnam and were quick to compare what the Americans were doing in Vietnam to what the United Kingdom was doing in Malaysia. American Embassy officials attributed this pro-American sentiment to extensive British press coverage of the bombing of the US embassy in Saigon in late March which killed two US personnel.¹¹²

These collective arguments were representative of majority Labour Party opinion and pushed Wilson toward disassociation from the United States. There was, however, an opposite influence coming from the Office of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Affairs staff argued for a continued pro-American policy. They believed that the “special relationship” should be salvaged at all costs since ties to America provided Britain’s most important source of power. Given these conflicting pressures, Wilson decided to propose still another peace initiative while denying troops to the Americans. This two-pronged strategy would keep the opposition busy. As he confided to Richard Crossman, “My strategy is to put the Tories on the defensive and always give them awkward choices.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Telegram from London Embassy to State Department, March 24, 1965, NSF, COF: UK, box 207, UK Cables vol. III, doc. 48, LBJL.

¹¹² American Embassy London Report on Parliamentary Debates, April 1, 1965, NSF, COF: UK, box 207, UK Cables vol. III, doc. 37, LBJL.

¹¹³ Crossman, The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, 50.

Prime Minister Wilson's frustration with the conflicting attitudes in Parliament was only compounded as his relationship with President Johnson began to deteriorate. As early as February 7, 1965 the two argued over Wilson's refusal to send troops to Vietnam. Johnson believed that Wilson had no right to become involved in any peace process if he were unwilling to participate in the fight. Wilson, in turn, felt he had no choice in not sending troops given his domestic situation and believed that he and the government could still be effective mediators if the Americans kept them informed. This led to increasing tensions at meetings between Wilson and the President and his cabinet members.¹¹⁴

This troubled personal relationship provided another incentive for Wilson to publicly oppose US actions in Vietnam. Many of Wilson's contemporaries have argued that he wanted to establish himself as a great international statesman, comparable to Winston Churchill or Harold MacMillan. They believed that Wilson was more concerned with becoming an important partner to the United States than with the peace process. Some officials were frustrated with Wilson's preoccupation with grandeur. Minister of Housing Richard Crossman expressed his, "disillusionment with his [Wilson] gimmickry" and his belief that the Prime Minister needed to commit to a "real job of work based on a real strategy."¹¹⁵ Based on Wilson's own accounts of meetings with President Johnson and observations by others, the Prime Minister believed that his abilities and influence were greater than they really were.

¹¹⁴ Sylvia A Ellis, "Lyndon Johnson, Harold Wilson and the Vietnam War: A Not So Special Relationship?" in Twentieth Century Anglo-American Relations, ed Jonathan Hollowell (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 180-96.

¹¹⁵ Crossman, The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, 571-72.

Wilson's interaction with the far more aggressive Johnson did little to improve his personal situation or Britain's international standing. By openly defying the wishes of the President, Wilson, along with his Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, believed he could present an image of a strong and independent leader who was not easily controlled by the United States. Wilson recounts several meetings with Washington officials in which his and Stewart's open opposition ostensibly changed the attitudes of key officials. One such instance occurred on March 22, 1965, when Foreign Secretary Stewart met with Secretary of State Rusk and later with President Johnson. Stewart was sent to argue against escalating the war and for negotiations. Wilson claimed in his memoirs, "With his firm, persuasive and often underrated authority, he had a marked effect in... steering American thinking away from negative attitudes to negotiations."¹¹⁶

Given President Johnson's perception of Harold Wilson, Stewart's influence was overstated. LBJ was continually upset with the Prime Minister for not assisting in the war and showed open disdain for the man on a personal level. Johnson based his sense of Wilson as untrustworthy in part on information and opinions furnished by Washington officials. The CIA opined that Wilson might be an "untrustworthy" person who was committed to the special relationship "based solely on sentiment."¹¹⁷ Johnson also had a preconceived dislike for British Prime Ministers after a misunderstanding with Prime Minister Douglas-Home in 1964. Wilson, himself, expressed concern with Johnson's attitude when recounting a discussion with the President in which he was told that

¹¹⁶ Wilson, A Personal Record, 86.

¹¹⁷ "CIA Biographical Statement on Harold Wilson", NSF, Country File, Box 213, LBJL.

Johnson, “would never trust a British Prime Minister again.”¹¹⁸ These opinions did not help the two establish a friendly personal relationship and, as Wilson’s actions began to conflict with President Johnson’s goals, the President’s opinion of the Prime Minister deteriorated further.

Yet with the collapse of the personal relationship between Wilson and Johnson and the apparent lack of support for the “special relationship” that these events portrayed, there were still many members of the British Government that clung to the idea of a bond between the nations. As Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart argued in 1965, “I say we have on these occasions expressed differences, but I want to warn you (if it is necessary to do so) against the attitude of mind which regards disagreeing with the United States as a desirable thing in itself.” He feared that the Vietnam situation would break down the relationship and he saw that as a detriment to Great Britain’s hope of remaining a world power. He believed, “We do recognize them as our friends and our allies, ... I have made this point because it is a clearly stated part of our Party policy that we want not merely to remain in but to strengthen the Atlantic alliance and I am sure we are right to do that.”¹¹⁹

Even with the strained relationship between the Prime Minister and the President, Wilson continued to pursue diplomatic initiatives for peace. At the June 18-20, 1965, Commonwealth Conference, Wilson proposed a Commonwealth peace mission consisting of four Prime Minister’s who would visit various national capitals- most importantly Washington, Moscow, Peking, Hanoi, Saigon, and the three ICC member’s capitals- to present opposing views on Vietnam and a proposal for the ending of

¹¹⁸ Wilson, A Personal Record, 46.

¹¹⁹ Labour Party, Report of the Sixty-Fifth Annual Conference, 180-81; “Britain and the United States,” in Anglo-American Relations Since 1939: the Enduring Alliance, ed. John Baylis (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 161.

hostilities. The objective of the mission was to secure a withdrawal of all foreign military from the North and the South, neutralize the area, establish an international peace force under the auspices of the Geneva Agreements, and present guidelines for the eventual reunification of Vietnam. Wilson's proposal was ambitious but ultimately never came to fruition because of the divergent views of the Commonwealth members on the Vietnam War and their support or opposition to American policy.¹²⁰ Prime Minister Wilson also kept open the line of communication with the Soviets throughout the remainder of 1965 and again in the spring of 1966 without any response.

Domestic discontent with US actions in Vietnam and London's policy of support reached a peak on June 29, 1966, after the Americans bombed the city of Hanoi and the port of Haiphong. Public outcry arose immediately and the Leftist members of the Labour party responded by strongly urging Wilson to disassociate the government from the United States. In Resolution No. 22 presented by Member of Parliament A. Kitson at the 1966 Labour Party Conference, leftist members wanted the conference to publicly, "condemn American intervention in South-East Asia," and urged the government to announce that it "cannot give any support to unilateral action by any country using military force to interfere in the internal politics of other states."¹²¹ A second proposal, Resolution No. 32, urged the conference to, "call upon the Government to dissociate itself from American policies and military operations in Vietnam." The resolution explained that, "We say that unless we are seen not to be supporting all the policies and

¹²⁰ Wilson, A Personal Record, 108-18.

¹²¹ Labour Party, Report of the Sixty-Fifth Annual Conference, 182.

military operations of America in Vietnam we are inhibited from playing our part as mediator for peace in that situation.”¹²²

The bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong even prompted one of the America’s biggest supporters within the Labour Government, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, to speak out. At the 1966 Labour Party Conference, Stewart took “the view that while we are and are glad to be the friends and allies of the United States we should be prepared, when we believe the importance of the issue warrants it, to state differences of opinion frankly and cordially as between friends and allies.”¹²³ While he was not as emphatic that the government should distance itself from the United States, it was clear that he too believed that the government had no choice but to publicly state its disapproval of the US actions. Wilson responded with a statement in Parliament the following day that while he still supported America’s general policy in Vietnam, “we should, nevertheless, feel bound to re-affirm that we must dissociate ourselves from an action of this kind.”¹²⁴ Parliament and the British populace welcomed Wilson’s condemnation of American actions but public protest of the war still expanded. Wilson, still convinced that he could bring the United States and Hanoi through the Soviets to the negotiating table, continued to pursue diplomatic opportunities when they were presented.

The next opportunity came in February 1967 when he submitted another peace proposal to Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin. In January, Washington had launched Project Sunflower, a direct approach to Hanoi through the North Vietnamese embassy in Moscow to bring both sides to the negotiating table. Johnson proposed what he called the

¹²² Labour Party, Report of the Sixty-Fifth Annual Conference, 184-85.

¹²³ Ibid., 180-81.

¹²⁴ Wilson, A Personal Record, 247-48.

Phase A-Phase B plan in which Washington agreed to stop bombing unconditionally in Phase A and then both sides would take mutual steps of de-escalation in Phase B. When the approach through the embassy produced no results, Johnson sent a letter directly to President Ho Chi Mihn in which he modified the Phase A-Phase B formula leaving a time lag between the bombing halt and the end of North Vietnamese infiltrations.¹²⁵

Prime Minister Wilson entered the talks with Soviet Premier Kosygin on February 6, 1967, under the reluctant approval of Washington and presented the original Phase A-Phase B plan to Moscow without the knowledge that President Johnson had already submitted a revised version to Hanoi. After a week of negotiations, Wilson convinced Kosygin to relay the original plan to the North Vietnamese. The Soviet Premier realized he had been given two differing written offers, one directly from the President of the United States and the other from the uninformed Prime Minister Wilson.¹²⁶ When the Johnson administration discovered that both messages had been forwarded, the President demanded that Wilson's proposal be retracted and the Prime Minister's credibility was lost. After the incident, it was discovered that both Wilson and Johnson were to blame for the failure of Project Sunflower. Washington had delayed informing London of the changes to the Phase A-Phase B plan until after the Prime Minister had presented the offer to the Soviets and Prime Minister Wilson had been so eager to bring the Soviets into the negotiations that he had neglected to discuss his statements with Washington prior to forwarding it to Kosygin. These futile overtures made the British Government look

¹²⁵ George C. Herring, ed., The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating volumes of the Pentagon Papers (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1983) 20-24.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 374-75.

increasingly ineffective in the international arena and eventually led the Prime Minister to surrender his diplomatic agenda.

In the end, the Wilson Government was forced to step away from the peace process, disassociate itself from the actions of the United States and accept its position as being too weak to affect the peace process. As it worked out, Britain was so far out of the process that they had no input whatsoever when the decisive Paris Peace talks of 1972-1973 finally took place. Britain's "special relationship" with the United States was not permanently damaged but by disassociating itself from American actions in Vietnam, London was able to gain entrance into the European Economic Community in 1973 and begin a Euro-centric shift in foreign and economic policy that would last until the 1980s.

CHAPTER 4

CANADA AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Canada's relationship with and reliance on the United States differed greatly from its Commonwealth partners. Canadian Prime Ministers Lester Pearson and Minister of External affairs Paul Martin openly agreed with the American objective of stopping communist aggression in South Vietnam but were unable to help militarily in the intervention. Although Ottawa had been providing economic and non-combatant aid to South Vietnam for nearly two decades, Canada was prohibited from an active military role due to its membership in the International Control Commission (ICC). Once Washington began its more flags campaign, Canada was not placed under the same pressure to commit troops as the other Commonwealth members.

President Johnson was aware of the restriction accompanying Canada's membership in the ICC. Canada was appointed a member of the ICC in 1954 as a part of the Geneva Agreements. This role completely prohibited any Canadian combat involvement in Vietnam by making the ICC responsible for the implementation of the provisions of the agreement. Unlike Britain's claim that its sponsorship of the Geneva conferences blocked its combat involvement, Canada was actually prohibited by international agreement from intervening. This relieved Prime Minister Pearson of the personal pressure Johnson

continually exerted on British Prime Minister Wilson and also allowed Ottawa a level of independence from Washington in formulating its own Vietnam policy.

This freedom also derived from Canada's geopolitical security. Sharing a border with the United States and being located directly between America and the Eastern borders of the Soviet Union made Canada a major security concern for Washington. Knowing that an attack on Canada could be the first step toward an attack against the United States and that any military maneuvers against the eastern side of the Soviet Union would require American use of Canadian air space and territory led Americans to conclude that Canadian security was as important as American security. By the early 1960s, Canada was a member of the North Atlantic Security Alliance and had agreed to participate in Distant Early Warning Line (DEW) under the supervision of the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD). DEW was an early tracking and interception air defense system created and used by the United States and located completely on Canadian soil. It was intended to insure American security against a Soviet air attack, but its operation also required securing Canadian airspace. All of this meant that Canada was not in the same vulnerable predicament as Australia. While Australia wanted Washington's help in Southeast Asia to increase security in its region, the United States wanted Canadian help to secure its own region.¹²⁷

While this geopolitical reality allowed Canada a degree of independence from the United States, it did not mean that Canada was completely free of any American pressure over Vietnam. Johnson may not have been able to bully Canada for military assistance because of the ICC but he could use Canada's diplomatic relationship with Hanoi to his advantage. It became apparent to Washington that Canada was most useful as a

¹²⁷ Annette Baker Fox, The Politics of Attraction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 75-76.

negotiating conduit between the United States and Hanoi, and the United States began to use the Canadian representatives to relay offers of negotiation to Ho Chi Minh. The Canadian representatives were also used to gain valuable information on North Vietnamese movements and violations of the Geneva agreements. Canada's diplomatic access to Hanoi was invaluable to the United States, and it was important to use Canada's position without compromising Ottawa's integrity within the ICC. Any pressure on Ottawa to provide combat forces would have jeopardized its relationship with Hanoi.

Canadian ICC Membership

Canadian utility to the United States began long before that of Australia or Great Britain. As part of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, Canada was appointed as one of the three members of the International Control Commission. The ICC was an international oversight body created at the Geneva Conference to guarantee the French evacuation from Vietnam and the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces to their respective sides of the seventeenth parallel. The members of the Commission employed inspection teams to observe the implementation of the provisions and to investigate any complaints of misconduct by either side. If the inspection team could not resolve a complaint, then a full complaint would be forwarded to the Commission which made a ruling by majority vote and recommended a solution to the dispute. The final duty of the Commission was to supervise the nationwide elections scheduled for 1956.¹²⁸

Canada was placed in the ICC to represent Western interests and as a counter weight to the Polish membership which represented Soviet and Eastern Bloc interests. India was

¹²⁸ Paul Bridle, Behind the Headlines: Canada and the International Commission in Indochina, 1954-1972 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1973), 1-8.

the third, “neutral” member and the chair of the Commission. Because the Canadian member was seen as the Western representative, Washington believed that it could employ Ottawa to legitimate its actions in Vietnam. When Washington decided that the 1956 elections should not be held, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles consulted Canadian Minister of External Affairs Lester B. Pearson and they agreed that the Canadians would contend that the actions of the Viet Minh and not South Vietnam had been responsible.¹²⁹

Throughout the remainder of the 1950s, Canada continued to meet its responsibility to the ICC. By far the most American-friendly member of the Commission, Canada tried to remain as neutral in its decisions as possible. But Canada’s membership soon became a double-edged sword. Through its ICC participation, Ottawa was able to gain valuable information on North Vietnamese actions and to function as an advocate for American and Vietnamese position. Canada’s diplomatic access to areas in the North also provided Washington with information on Hanoi’s activities which the United States would not have otherwise had.

To maintain diplomatic integrity in the eyes of the North Vietnamese, Canadian delegates were often forced to find in the North’s favor in the investigations. Between 1954 and 1965, the Canadian delegation supported the South Vietnamese and Americans in only 53 percent of its decisions while Poland, the Eastern Bloc representative which was not being threatened with loss of access to the South, sided with the North Vietnamese in 84 percent of its decisions. This voting record placed a strain on the relationship between Washington and Ottawa. Many in Washington wanted Canada to

¹²⁹ Edelgard Mahant and Graeme S. Mount, *Invisible and Inaudible in Washington: American Policies Toward Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 40-43.

cite more North Vietnamese infractions of the Geneva Accords and to keep the American infractions out of the findings. Canada was unable to help the Americans to the extent that Washington wished because, as one Indian delegate explained, the American violations were so obvious that the Commission had no choice but acknowledge them while the Communist's infractions were much more subtle. Increasing quantities of U.S. material and advisory troops arrived in South Vietnam through the ports in Saigon where the ICC delegations to the South were stationed. In contrast, North Vietnamese were infiltrating into the South through the jungles and down the Ho Chi Minh Trail which were far less accessible to the Commission investigators.¹³⁰

In a June 1962 ICC report, the Commission found that the North had violated the Geneva agreements by transporting "armed and unarmed personnel, arms, and munitions and other supplies" from the North to the South "with the object of supporting, organizing and carrying out hostile activities." It also found South Vietnam in violation for "receiving the increased military aid from the United States" and the "introduction of a large number of U.S. Military personnel beyond the stated strength" which amounted to a "factual military alliance, which is prohibited under ... the Geneva Agreements."¹³¹ By finding both sides in violation, the ICC showed how its authority over the parties was contingent on its ability to placate each side and resulted in diminished access to each zone. Canada maintained its diplomatic relationship with Hanoi which proved both useful and frustrating to the United States. The Canadian ICC delegation often informed Washington and Saigon of the content of discussions at the Commission meetings and gave the Americans information and findings that were not included in the ICC Reports.

¹³⁰ Mahant, Invisible and Inaudible in Washington, 50-54.

¹³¹ Bridle, Behind the Headlines, 17-18.

This information helped Washington formulate both military strategy and its negotiations proposals.

Canada ultimately became disillusioned with the ICC's lack of any real power to control or monitor the actions of the opposing sides. By the spring of 1963 when the Pearson Government took office, a majority of Canadian Parliament members were ready to resign from the ICC and distance themselves from the unpopular American policy. Others in the administration supported the American resolve to stop communist insurgents and decided to increase Canadian diplomatic assistance. When serious hostilities broke out with U.S. bombing of the North following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the ICC was completely removed from the North and greatly restricted in the South since neither of Hanoi nor Saigon could ensure the safety of the ICC representatives. Not until 1972 would the ICC again have any real efficacy in Vietnam.¹³²

Canadian Assistance to the More Flags Campaign

With the initiation of the more flags campaign, President Johnson and Secretary Rusk began to examine potential Canadian usefulness. Secretary Rusk met with Canadian Prime Minister Pearson and Minister of External Affairs Paul Martin in late April 1964 and proposed using Canada's new ICC Commissioner, Blair Seaborn, to convey messages to Hanoi regarding Washington's intentions and to act as an intermediary in negotiations. Rusk intended to use Seaborn to convey America's "determination to see things through" but to stress that Washington "wants no military bases or other footholds in South Vietnam or Laos." Rusk also proposed that Seaborn use his access to determine

¹³² Bridle, Behind the Headlines, 17-18.

how much pressure or backing the Chinese were providing Ho Chi Minh and whether he “considers himself over-extended and exposed.”¹³³

On May 28, 1964, President Johnson and Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson met at the New York Hilton Hotel and discussed the possible Seaborn mission. The Prime Minister assured Johnson that Canada “agreed on the importance of sending Mr. Seaborn to Vietnam” and was eager “to have a Canadian officer play this important role of reporting accurately the purposes of the United States Government and the meaning of any actions in which it might be involved.” The President responded that the United States was grateful and declared that “the U.S. had no desire to threaten any government in the area, and wanted nothing more than the restoration of peace in countries which were now under attack from outside.”¹³⁴

At that same time, the State Department Special Assistant on Vietnam William Sullivan and Canadian Minister of External Affairs Martin also met to discuss the possible Seaborn Mission and began finalizing the details. They agreed that Seaborn “need not agree with or associate his government with the substance of some of the messages he would be asked to transmit.”¹³⁵

The final guidelines for the Seaborn mission were forwarded to the Canadian Embassy on May 30, 1964. Seaborn was asked to transmit messages between Washington and Hanoi verbatim regardless of his agreement or disagreement with the

¹³³ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1968-1964, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publication Office, 1992), 281-82.

¹³⁴ Memorandum for the Record of a Conversation between President Johnson and Prime Minister Pearson, Hilton Hotel, New York, May 28, 1964 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1968-1964, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publication Office, 1992), 394-95.

¹³⁵ See footnote to Memorandum for the Record of a Conversation between President Johnson and Prime Minister Pearson, Hilton Hotel, New York, May 28, 1964 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1968-1964, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publication Office, 1992), 394-95.

content and was to be assured that the Canadian Government would not have to associate itself with the messages. He was directed to observe the North Vietnamese for any signs of internal struggles, tensions with the Soviets or China, and for signs of war weariness. Most importantly, Seaborn was to relay Washington's intention to "maintain the independence and territorial integrity of South Viet-nam" and to warn that unless Hanoi ceased all acts of war within one week of the approach, "the United States will initiate action by air and naval means against North Vietnam until Hanoi does agree." If Hanoi agreed, the United States would work to reopen trade with North Vietnam, provide economic aid, extend diplomatic recognition and phase out U.S. forces in South Vietnam over a one-year period.¹³⁶

In Seaborn's first mission to Hanoi on June 18, 1964, he met with North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and delivered the American message. Pham "welcomed the opening up of the Channel" but also expressed his displeasure with the commando raids being conducted by the United States and the South Vietnamese in Laos. Seaborn's assessment of Pham Van Dong's reaction left him cautious but mildly encouraged.¹³⁷ Pham Van Dong then explained Ho Chi Minh's position to Seaborn. His solution required a complete American withdrawal from Indochina, a South Vietnamese Government arranged by the people of the South including the National Liberation Front, and a reunification of the country without military intervention. The North Vietnamese Prime Minister assured Seaborn that the people of Vietnam did not want the war to

¹³⁶ Memorandum to Alexis Johnson: Instruction for Canadian Interlocutor with Hanoi, June 1, 1964, in, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating volumes of the Pentagon Papers, ed. George C. Herring (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1983), 20-24.

¹³⁷ Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, June 24, 1964, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1968-1964, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publication Office, 1992), 524-25.

intensify but would fight if required. He emphasized, “it is impossible for you Westerners to understand the force of the people’s will to resist and to continue.”¹³⁸

Washington was disappointed with the North Vietnamese response and began looking more closely at the possibility of military intervention. In his July 2, 1964, circular telegram the President increased the pressure for third country participation by directly appealing to the countries for increased contributions.¹³⁹ Canada was also concerned with the apparent stalemate resulting from the initial mission. In response to Johnson’s pleas for assistance, Department of External Affairs officials recommended to the Prime Minister that Ottawa increase its current aid program to Vietnam by examining the “shopping list” of supplies needed by the South Vietnamese to see what Canada could supply without jeopardizing its ICC neutrality.

While working closely with Seaborn to propose peace negotiations with Hanoi, the State Department was also pursuing the more flags campaign. In a June 15, 1964, memorandum, Dean Rusk recognized that the Canadians were worried about increasing any contributions to Vietnam because of the ICC. He also acknowledged the increasing Canadian public opposition to U.S. action in Vietnam.¹⁴⁰ In a July 10 assessment of third country assistance by the State Department, Canadian contributions included a plan for

¹³⁸ Telegram from State Department to AmEmbassy in Saigon, July 11, 1964, in Herring, Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, 31-32.

¹³⁹ Circular Telegram for the Ambassador from the President, July 2, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 6, Folder 2, doc. 45, LBJL.

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum for the President: Third Country Aid to Vietnam, June 15, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 5, Folder 6, doc. 7, LBJL.

additional aid to the University of Hue and an increased number of Canadian Government grants for Vietnamese students to study in Canada.¹⁴¹

Discussion of a possible second mission was underway in late July and early August when the Gulf of Tonkin incident stiffened the American resolve. Seaborn arranged a meeting with Pham Van Dong on August 13 and was instructed to convey that the “Americans were at a complete loss to understand the DRV motive” in the attacks and that the “only reasonable hypothesis was that North Vietnam was intent on ... provoking the United States.” Seaborn was to clarify that the *USS Maddox* was not associated with any attacks on the DRV and that Washington’s response “for the present will be limited and fitting.” Further, the American “patience with North Vietnamese aggression is growing extremely thin” and the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution re-affirmed the determination of the U.S. Government “to continue to oppose firmly...DRV efforts to subvert and conquer South Vietnam and Laos.” Finally, Seaborn was to warn Pham Van Dong that “if the DRV persists in this present course, it can expect to continue to suffer the consequences” because the United States possessed the “ways and means of measuring the DRV’s participation in, and direct control of, the war on South Vietnam... and would be carefully watching the DRV’s response.”¹⁴² Following the meeting, Seaborn notified Washington that Pham Van Dong had an “angry reaction” to this

¹⁴¹ State Department Circular Telegram: Third Country Aid to Vietnam, July 10, 1964, doc. 31 and Butterworth Telegram to State Department, July 7, 1964, doc. 39, NSF, COF: Vietnam, box 6, Folder 2, LBJL.

¹⁴² Telegram from State Department to AmEmbassy in Ottawa, August 8, 1964, in Herring, Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, 33-34.

catalog of US threats but Seaborn felt the North Vietnamese leader believed the channel of communication should remain open.¹⁴³

The Gulf of Tonkin incident elicited concern in Ottawa, but also reinforced Canadian resolve to support Washington. Canada decided to increase its non-military aid to South Vietnam and also proposed another Seaborn mission. Contending that serious talks with Hanoi were not possible under the circumstances, the United States resisted Canadian advances until mid-December.¹⁴⁴ Even then, Seaborn was given no new points to add to the prior communication. The main purpose of his visit was to assess if the DRV had changed its position from the previous summer and to reassert America's determination to assist the South Vietnamese.¹⁴⁵

Pearson and the Canadian Government were disappointed with Washington's refusal to use the opportunity to push harder for negotiations and became disillusioned with US policy as they had with the ineffectiveness of the ICC. This bitterness was compounded after Prime Minister Pearson's January 1965 trip to LBJ Ranch where President Johnson introduced him to the press as Prime Minister Wilson and then entertained the entire delegation with tours and dinners all the while avoiding any opportunity to discuss Vietnam.

The Canadian leader's disaffection was also apparent in their ambivalence regarding the level of their aid to South Vietnam. By the December 11, 1964, Canada had contributed \$1.5 million in educational, medical aid commodity assistance to South

¹⁴³ Telegram from AmEmbassy in Ottawa to State Department, August 18, 1964, in Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, 34-35.

¹⁴⁴ Greg Donaghy, Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States 1963-1968 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 126-27.

¹⁴⁵ Telegram from State Department to AmEmbassy in Ottawa, December 3, 1964, in Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, 37.

Vietnam. National Security Council Staff member Michael Forrestal deemed Canada a “poor candidate for additional significant help for political reasons.” Therefore, Ottawa should not be solicited again for assistance because of their ICC membership. He also warned that Ottawa might withdraw from the ICC and Southeast Asia because “they are in a sour mood.”¹⁴⁶

Following the initiation of Rolling Thunder bombing campaign in February 1965, Prime Minister Pearson came under growing pressure from international sources, such as Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and United Nations Secretary General U Thant, to use his influence as a close Washington ally to convince President Johnson that force would not yield negotiations. The Prime Minister also received domestic pressure from several sources-- such as External Affairs Under Secretary Escott Reid, intellectuals and students, younger members of the Liberal Party, and even his wife and son-- to speak out against the bombing. Pearson began to agree and voiced this shifting position in a February 10, 1965, speech. He criticized the escalating American involvement indirectly by urging the use of quiet diplomacy. He acknowledged North Vietnamese aggression against the Saigon, but criticized US involvement in the South where it “seems to have found no solid basis of support through a South Vietnam Government of strength and popularity.”¹⁴⁷

This speech was the first real evidence of Canadian disapproval with the United States actions in Vietnam, but it would not be the last. As the use of napalm and nerve gas became widely publicized, the Canadian public increased pressure on Ottawa to

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum for the President: Third Country Assistance to Vietnam, December 11, 1964, NSF, COF: Vietnam, Box 11, folder 2, doc. 173, LBJL.

¹⁴⁷ Copy of Prime Minister Pearson’s Speech at the Canadian Club in Ottawa, February 10, 1965, NSF, COF: Canada, box 165, folder 10, doc. 42a, LBJL. See also Donaghy, Tolerant Allies, 127-29.

distance itself from the Americans. Pearson incorporated the idea of using a bombing halt to encourage Hanoi to come to the negotiating tables in a speech he delivered at Temple University on April 2, 1965. While portraying US intervention as being one of honorable defense at the request of the South Vietnamese, Pearson made clear that he believed the extensive bombing should have had its intended effect of warning the North of US resolve. Therefore, he suggested, “a measured and announced pause in one field of military action at the right time might facilitate the development of diplomatic resources which cannot easily be applied to the problem under the existing circumstances.”¹⁴⁸

President Johnson was outraged by these speeches and made that very clear to the Prime Minister the following day at Camp David. After purposely ignoring Pearson for over an hour, Johnson led him out to the garden where he berated the Prime Minister for undercutting the US position. He was offended that Pearson had not discussed the speech with the White House for prior approval and that he had given the speech at an American university knowing that the President had been receiving great criticism from the universities.¹⁴⁹ The Prime Minister tried to smooth over the offense in a letter upon his return to Ottawa. He expressed Canada’s intention to support American policy in Vietnam but admitted that his government was increasingly apprehensive that Washington was headed in the wrong direction in Vietnam and he was therefore compelled to suggest a possible pause. Pearson stressed that his speech called for only a limited pause “at the right time” and that he believed that such an act would strengthen

¹⁴⁸ Lester B. Pearson, Mike: The Memoir of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, eds. John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1975), 138.

¹⁴⁹ State Department Telegram to Ottawa, April 6, 1965, NSF, COF: Canada, box 166, LBJL.

the President's position diplomatically.¹⁵⁰ Although the letter was accepted in Washington, the relationship between the President and the Prime Minister was never mended. As the Americans moved toward a full combat commitment in June, Canadians continued to pursue diplomatic alternatives. Two more diplomatic missions would be undertaken before it became clear to Ottawa that negotiations were not soon to come.

As America escalated its involvement throughout the summer of 1965, domestic and international pressure mounted on Pearson to move Washington toward negotiation. The Prime Minister notified Johnson that he was available to quietly pursue negotiations. He saw an opportunity during the 1965 Christmas bombing pause. Pearson and Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin proposed sending retired Canadian Ambassador to China Chester A. Ronning on a mission to Hanoi to promote talks between the combatants. Washington reluctantly approved the mission despite the suspicion most American officials, such as William Bundy and Dean Rusk, held for Ronning, who was openly critical of American Asian policy.¹⁵¹

The initial meeting occurred on March 7-11, 1966, after complications with travel visas to China and Hanoi held up the mission. Ronning met with several North Vietnamese officials including foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh but gained no movement on the North Vietnamese position that American acceptance of the Four Points was the only basis for a peaceful settlement. Ronning then met with Pham Van Dong who reluctantly indicated that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) would enter into some form of preliminary meetings if the United States agreed to cease bombing and combat exercises against the North. Pham further added that the North had already

¹⁵⁰ Pearson, Mike, 142-43.

¹⁵¹ Donaghy, Tolerant Allies, 132-35.

offered this in a January 4, 1966, letter to Washington. President Johnson and Secretary Rusk were not enthusiastic about the response. The January letter had indicated that only after the Americans agreed to the National Liberation Front's Four Points, would Hanoi agree to negotiations. Rusk feared Hanoi would interpret a bombing halt as US agreement to the Four Points and refused to give the Canadians a reply for Hanoi. External Affairs Minister Martin persistently urged the United States to respond until Washington agreed to a second Ronning mission.

Ronning was sent to Hanoi again on June 14, 1966, with the message that Washington was willing to talk without conditions, to de-escalate mutually, or to communicate with Hanoi via intermediaries but was not prepared to accept the Four Points proposal. He also carried instruction unknown to Washington. External Affairs Minister Martin directed Ronning to "advance the process" by requesting Pham Van Dong's interpretation of the third of the Four Points, which stated that South Vietnam's problems should be settled by the people without outside interference, and whether further exchanges on this point could be made. Martin believed that the Canadians could negotiate a more liberal North Vietnamese stance on this issue as a way to encourage the Americans to take a more flexible stance on the Four Points.¹⁵²

The second Ronning mission produced no results. He was told that Pham Van Dong was not available and the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh expressed only disappointment in the message.¹⁵³ The mission also had repercussions in Canada. Shortly before Ronning left for Hanoi, Prime Minister Pearson learned that Johnson and his advisors had authorized bombing strikes in Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor.

¹⁵² Donaghy, *Tolerant Allies*, 138-39; Herring, *Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 163-65.

¹⁵³ Herring, *Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 165.

Pearson and his advisors also discovered that Washington had sent a message through Peking of Ronning's upcoming visit and had expressed American willingness to suspend the bombing in exchange for a halt in the North's infiltration of the South as terms for negotiations. This message contained far more lenient terms than the message Washington sent through Ronning. Canadian official felt that the Americans expected the Canadian diplomat would receive a negative response and intended to use it as justification to gain public support for the approved bombing escalation.¹⁵⁴

The rift caused by the Ronning mission was only a symptom of a larger disagreement between the two countries over Vietnam. Canadian public support for American policy in Vietnam was down to 34 percent by May 1966 and the growing numbers of American draft-resisters crossing the border to Canada were adding to the anti-American sentiment. A delegation of faculty members from the University of Toronto's Victoria College was also exciting controversy for the Pearson Government by questioning the Defense Production Agreement between the United States and Canada in which Canadian produced military supplies were being sold to America and subsequently used in Vietnam.

President Johnson decided to visit New Brunswick in August 1966 in an attempt to salvage the deteriorating relationship. Prime Minister Pearson and External Affairs Minister Martin agreed with the President that the two governments had disagreements but would approach the problem of Vietnam together. This agreement calmed the tensions for a few months, but by January 1967 the public discontent with Vietnam began

¹⁵⁴ Donaghy, *Tolerant Allies*, 137-39.

to rise again and the Pearson Government faced new criticism that the ICC members were acting as US informants and not as international civil servants.¹⁵⁵

Canada finally broke with the United States over Vietnam for several reasons. Domestic opposition to American Vietnam policy and Canadian support for those policies threatened the Pearson Government's electoral prospects. Ottawa disagreed with the ongoing American escalation of hostilities because many officials feared that a protracted war would undermine American resolve to combat communism in other, more important places.¹⁵⁶ Finally, Pearson's support of American actions in Vietnam and his assistance in forwarding Washington's diplomatic proposals began jeopardizing Canadian credibility as a member of the International Control Commission and as an independent international diplomat. This contributed to Pearson losing the 1968 election and Pierre Elliott Trudeau replacing him as Prime Minister.

Trudeau opposed Canada's existing foreign policy of "quiet diplomacy" and reliance on the "special relationship" with the United States. He began reorganizing the Department of External Affairs, reducing Canadian commitments to NATO and the Atlantic alliance, and openly questioned the war in Vietnam. The Prime Minister encouraged draft evaders from America and publicly urged an end to the war. His relationship with the newly elected President Richard M. Nixon suffered greatly because of his anti-war attitude and his insistence that Canada extend diplomatic recognition to communist China. With the Vietnam war still growing despite of Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy, Trudeau faced public disapproval of Canadian alliance with the

¹⁵⁵ Donaghy, Tolerant Allies, 167-71.

¹⁵⁶ Ramesh Thakur, Peacekeeping in Vietnam: Canada, India, Poland, and the International Commission (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 15.

United States and lost his majority in the 1972 elections. In response, the Canadian Parliament under the Prime Minister's direction passed a resolution against the war in January 1973. The Canadian government agreed to serve on the ICSC constituted in 1973 but would no longer support American actions in Vietnam.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), 248-52.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The more flags campaign had little success. By June 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson committed full combat forces to Vietnam, the only Commonwealth nations to join the Americans were Australia and New Zealand. While the more flags campaign garnered greater success with other American allies, such as South Korea and the Philippines, the campaign revealed the strained relations between the United States and its traditional Commonwealth allies.

By the summer of 1964, Washington faced the inevitability that if the United States were going to stave off communist victory in South Vietnam, American troops would have to be engaged. The Johnson administration knew that such a policy could have negative consequences affecting not only the administration's popularity, but also its ability to pursue its domestic reform agenda. The more flags campaign sought to create the impression that Washington's actions were well supported and much wanted. It was never the intent of Johnson or his administration to establish a multilateral coalition in which the United States was just one of the participants. Washington meant to control the war in Vietnam and only solicited military support for public relations purposes. As the more flags campaign foundered and the frustration in the White House grew, the push for allies had the opposite effect. The more the administration pushed, the more America's

traditional allies disapproved military involvement. In the end, rifts between the capitals widened and relationships between the leaders disintegrated.

Each Commonwealth country was experiencing a period of readjustment; each faced economic, political and social changes that forced re-examinations of its own international relationships. At the same time, they confronted the struggle in Vietnam and Washington's insistence that her allies faithfully support American policy. American's fear of communism and its containment policy directed Washington's attention to Southeast Asia. London's need to improve its economic position and end post-colonial burdens drove Britain away from Southeast Asia. Caught in the middle were Australia, whose security relied directly on the security of the region, and Canada, which was inescapably entangled in Vietnam through its membership in the ICC.

Like the Johnson administration, most American allies faced internal dissension over the war. Britain and Canada experienced public opposition to the war and to the methods that the United States used to wage the conflict. As President Johnson well knew, losing public favor could adversely affect one's policy goals and even career. British Prime Minister Wilson and Canadian Prime Minister Pearson could ill afford to entangle themselves in an unpopular war in a region of little or no significance to their countries. Even though the United States was willing to fight in Vietnam out of fear of losing another country as had ostensibly happened with China, it did not follow that the Commonwealth members should do the same. They had other problems to address, and for Canada and the United Kingdom association with American policy was more of a hindrance to their agendas than a benefit to their security.

Great Britain was in the most precarious position over Vietnam. England had the largest military capabilities to contribute to South Vietnam, had the most to gain from American Cold War policy, and had only a minor diplomatic tie to the conflict which could prohibit a military contribution. London was, however, on the verge of economic collapse, in great need of re-building economic relationships with European countries that opposed the war, and faced growing internal protest against American actions in Vietnam. Prime Minister Wilson's ultimate goal was to preserve Britain's ties with the United States and its standing in the international community while placating the Labour Left which believed American policy in Vietnam was wrong and urged the Commonwealth to distance itself from the war. Wilson pacified the Left by refusing to send troops and attempted to mollify America by acting as a mediator.¹⁵⁸ Wilson's decision to intervene in the peace process may have been only a means of maintaining favor with the Johnson administration and a mechanism to reinsert England into détente diplomacy by mediating an end to the war. By accomplishing this, England would regain its status as a Cold War arbitrator. Not until after 1967 and the failure of Wilson's mediation did the British Government recognize that it could never maintain American favor without capitulating to Johnson's will. The frustration led Britain to publicly dissociate itself from American policy and withdraw from the peace process.

The more flags campaign highlighted the already shifting relationship between America and Britain. While agreeing to assist diplomatically in an attempt to assuage U.S. pressures, London was more concerned with not being too closely associated with American policy and thereby alienating the international, especially European,

¹⁵⁸ Chris Wrigley, "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Harold Wilson and Labour's Foreign Policy 1964-70," in *The Wilson Government 1964-1970*, ed. R Loopey & S. Fielding (London: Printer Publishers, 1993), 123-35.

community. Had the United Kingdom not been applying for membership into the European Economic Community, for both its economic and security benefits, there may have been a greater willingness to assist the United States in its endeavor. Washington continued its war policy without its most significant western allies because, militarily, there was no need. What Johnson needed most from the British was public support to help quell US domestic opposition rather than any economic or military assistance that the smaller nation could provide.

Canada was in the least precarious situation. Its membership in the International Control Commission precluded any military involvement in Vietnam. This was very clear to the Johnson administration and relieved Ottawa of much of the pressure that other nations experienced. Prime Minister Pearson still felt that Canada had to provide some support for her neighbor's actions and did so through diplomatic means. The Seaborn mission did help Canada to establish its own diplomatic utility, separate from Britain and the Commonwealth. Unfortunately for Washington, whose campaign was designed to gain public support for the war, most of the Canadian contributions could not be made public. The government did provide substantial economic assistance to South Vietnam and agreed to become a member of the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) which was set up to implement the new peace agreement in 1973. Canada's experience in Vietnam made little difference in its relationship with the United States. The positive results coming from Ottawa's willingness to transmit messages through the ICC were countered by opposition expressed by the populace and many members of the government.

Of the Commonwealth nations, only Australia, along with a token force from New Zealand, committed troops to South Vietnam. Theirs was a choice necessitated by security needs and was the result of years of encouraging the United States to take a greater interest in the region. Washington considered Canberra's commitment one of the more flags campaign's successes, yet it was Australia which spent far more time encouraging the Americans to increase involvement in South Vietnam. Unlike the other Commonwealth nations, Australia had a vested interest in seeing the Americans committed to the region and was therefore far more likely to respond to the campaign.

Australia's contribution had little effect on the outcome of the conflict. While its troops were quite effective soldiers, Australia only committed three battalions by the end of 1966. Thus the Americans and South Vietnamese continued to do the bulk of the fighting. Canberra's involvement also yielded mixed results. By being one of the few mid-level powers to support the United States, Australia greatly improved its relationship with Washington but in so doing, entangled itself in a an un-winnable situation that led to internal political dissent. By the time Australia's six-year participation ended in 1971, four governments had been voted from office and the public support for the war had turned to protest.

Ultimately, Vietnam created a closer relationship between Australia and the United States only to have the domestic Australian opposition to the war, which developed out of that involvement, tear the relationship apart. The willingness of Australia to act in conjunction with the United States against the communism did establish a closer relationship that would be called upon again in the future. Most importantly, Australia's Vietnam experience showed the ever increasing divide between Canberra and London.

Where, as a Commonwealth member, Australia had always turned to the United Kingdom to ensure its geopolitical security, now it would rely on the United States.

The more flags campaign also exacerbated the President Johnson's strained relationship with the Commonwealth leaders. Johnson took the lack of positive response from the British and Canadian Prime Ministers as a personal affront. A great rift developed between the President and British Prime Minister Wilson whom Johnson believed was untrustworthy and whom he continually confronted over his lack of assistance. As early as 1965 the two argued over Wilson's refusal to send troops to Vietnam. Johnson believed that Wilson had no right to become involved in any peace process if he were unwilling to participate in the fight. Wilson, in turn, felt he had no choice in not sending troops given his domestic situation and believed that he and Britain could still be effective mediators if the Americans kept them in the information loop. This led to increasing tension at meetings between Wilson and the President.¹⁵⁹

The relationship between the President and Canadian Prime Minister Pearson also suffered under the strain. After the Prime Minister made his April 1965 Temple University speech in which he mildly criticized U.S. policy, the President summoned Pearson to Camp David where he berated the Prime Minister for not showing proper support for American actions. Pearson was less offended by the President's tirade than other leaders. He seemed to understand Johnson's distress when he said of the President following his meeting at Camp David, "he is more worried about US policy in Vietnam

¹⁵⁹ Sylvia A. Ellis, "Lyndon Johnson, Harold Wilson and the Vietnam War: A Not So Special Relationship?", in *Twentieth Century Anglo-American Relations*, ed. Jonathan Hollowell (New York: Palgrave, 2001, 180-96.

than he is willing to show. His irritation at any indication of lack of full support for his policy... really indicate a feeling of insecurity about the situation.”¹⁶⁰

It was this insecurity in the face of increasing international and domestic opposition that led the Johnson administration to pursue more flags. The more flags campaign failed. The results exposed growing divisions within the Commonwealth and a realignment of security alliances between the United States and her traditional allies, but had minimal practical results in gaining military assistance for American objectives in Southeast Asia. Johnson in effect cast aside any real search for an international policy in Vietnam in favor of a unilateral, interventionist approach. With only minimal support from Australia, the United States slowly abandoned the policy by mid-1966. Washington chose instead to pursue its war policy without a coalition of Commonwealth support and eventually received open criticism from all the members, including its only ally, Australia. The Vietnam War also contributed to a re-alignment within the Commonwealth itself. Britain turned toward Europe, Australia moved closer to their American ally, and Canada chose to pursue an independent path. Both US overtures and Commonwealth responses illustrated the uncertain and shifting nature of alliance building and its collapse in the absence of true mutual security and economic interest.

The failure of the more flags campaign also held consequences for President Johnson. The lack of open support that the Johnson administration found in its allies greatly troubled the President. The opposition both at home and abroad prompted the Johnson not to seek a second term and left the President feeling more isolated. As he told Prime

¹⁶⁰ Pearson, Mike, 141.

Minister Pearson in the spring of 1965, “I’m beginning to feel like a martyr, misunderstood and misjudged by friends.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Pearson, Mike, 141.

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